



08 August 2006

Ms Kate Rounce
Casino Advisory Panel Secretariat
c/o Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2 – 4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Ms Rounce

Examination in Public regarding a Regional Casino Licence - Newcastle upon Tyne

The North East Chamber of Commerce, (NECC) would appreciate the opportunity to represent the interests of the region's business community during the forthcoming Examination in Public about Newcastle City Council's bid for a licence to develop a regional casino.

NECC is a key stakeholder in the North East, representing the views of the region's business. The Chamber has around 5,000 members, which collectively employ more than 30 per cent of the total North East workforce. Its membership is drawn from every sector of industry and commerce and includes businesses of every size: from self-employed ventures to multi-national companies.

As the only regional chamber of commerce in the country NECC is able to provide a unique perspective of North East business, this reflects its endeavours to raise the region's prosperity by striving for more business; better business; and better conditions for business. Tyne and Wear is our strongest area with 2006 members.

Newcastle upon Tyne is the region's most important economic centre and the Chambers activities in the city reflect this importance. NECC has over 750 members in the City area and its members are actively involved in many aspects of the City's efforts to regenerate its economy. The Newcastle Partnership is chaired by a Chamber member who also sits on the City Centre Partnership. The Chair of NECC's influential Newcastle committee and I are members of the Newcastle Partnership Board. In these roles, NECC is able to act as a critical friend of the Council and the Partnership.

The subject of Regional Casino and Convention Centre development has been discussed by our members throughout the region in response to local authorities' plans to apply for a licence.

NECC welcomes plans to develop 'Super Casinos', when they are linked to others that will contribute to the economic regeneration of our towns and cities. The Chamber has given its support in discussions about the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy, which both encourage the development of a Regional Casino and Regional Convention Centre as a means of increasing the profile of the region and associated tourism and visitor opportunities.

Members in Newcastle expressed their warm support for the City Council's application, during their Committee meeting of 20 March 2006. This support was reiterated by NECC representatives at meetings of both the Newcastle Partnership and the Newcastle City Centre Partnership.

Having had the opportunity to study the Council's formal proposal in detail, NECC considers that it contains well researched, conservatively presented and reasonable submissions. These include adequate protection to vulnerable members of society, as well as stating the case for the licence to be granted on economic development grounds.

The city's proposals are strengthened because it has not agreed a partnership with a preferred developer, enabling the Council to enter into competitive negotiations with a number of developers. This shows real business acumen; the city will be able to maximise the benefits that will undoubtedly flow from a casino development in the city. The most important of which will be the addition of a much needed regional convention centre.

Newcastle is at the heart of a passionate region; its business and leisure tourism market is growing and its reputation as a welcoming city with passionate people sets it apart from the UK's other core cities. The convention centre and regional casino will enhance this offer adding to the city's burgeoning tourism industry.

Although the Council has not decided upon a final location for the Casino and Convention Centre – its proposals should stitch the west of the city to the city centre in a tangible way. The employment and business growth opportunities that this proposal includes will have a dramatic effect on the economy of the city as a whole but with specific positive effects on the populations of the inner and outer west wards. Proposals to invest in training in customer service and other skills as part of the proposal are particularly welcome.

Recent research by the think tank 'Reform' ¹ concluded that between 2001 and 2004 there was a big migration south by young people aged 20-29, with London and the southeast gaining nearly 40,000, and East Anglia almost 12,500. All other regions except the southwest had a net loss of young people.

¹ July 2006, "Whitehall's Last Colonies: Breaking the Cycle of Collectivisation in the Regions". Professor N Bosanquet, Imperial College London.

The effect of the emigration is to “grey” the populations of the least successful regions, with more than 42% of people in Wales and the northeast over the age of 44, compared with fewer than 32% in London.

When large government programmes are proposed, such as the development of a regional casino, the NECC argues that they should come to areas of the country that would benefit the greatest from the development. This project will bring much needed wealth and tourists to NewcastleGateshead and the whole region will share in this investment.

If the Casino were to be developed in Greenwich or Wembley, the benefits would be lost in the wave of large projects connected with the Olympics. The decision of where to grant the licence will be a test of whether the Government takes the problems of the regions seriously.

Yours sincerely



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Committee