

GMB calls for change in rules to allow four very large casinos to be licenced

A GMB report, to be published tomorrow (Saturday 11th February 2006) at the Labour Party Spring Conference in Blackpool, identifies 13 towns and cities with schemes in the pipeline to secure approval for the 17 new casino licenses to be issued under the Gambling Act 2005. The reports also identify the would-be developers for each scheme and their casino partners.

The Gambling Act 2005 provided for one very large casino, eight large and eight small casinos to be developed in the UK. A new Gambling Commission was established in October 2005 to issue the licenses and to regulate the industry. The Government has set up a Casino Advisory Panel (CAP) to advise them in which areas the new types of casino will be located. The Panel will be required to take into account the social impact of a development and also the potential for regeneration of an area. The regional planning bodies will be invited to identify a broad list of locations suitable for the casinos allowed and local authorities will need to be prepared to give planning permission. The Panel is expected to report by the end of 2006. Based on the Panel's advice, the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, after consulting counterparts in Scotland and Wales will specify the areas for the 17 casinos.

The GMB reports (see note 1) identify that there are 19 schemes in 13 areas in the race for the one very large casino. The areas are Blackpool (there are reports of 22 approaches by casino operators and developers), Birmingham (with two schemes), Cardiff, Coventry, Glasgow (three schemes), Liverpool, Leeds, London (three schemes), Manchester (2 schemes), Middlesbrough, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Salford, and Sunderland. Project planning for some of these schemes is well

developed and they have secured local backing. For Cardiff, for example, Aspers is the approved bidder there. For others the schemes are sketchy and face local opposition. Only one of these schemes will get the go ahead as a very large casino and the others may seek to apply for the large and/or small casino licenses. The report also contains the list of the 161 licensed casinos under the old 1968 legislation 143 of which are currently operating. There has also been a rush of applications before the old regulations lapse in April 2006. The Gambling Commission says it has thirty-eight licenses under consideration and a further fifteen have been granted but still await approval by the local authorities.

Paul Kenny, GMB Acting General Secretary said, " One license for the very large casino is not enough. The Government should be bold and go for a minimum of four as these offer fantastic potential for regeneration with real quality jobs.

GMB, the union for casino workers, want to see schemes approved which have proven regeneration impacts. We also want to see new the casinos run by operators with a proven track record of creating well paid quality jobs and treating their workforce with dignity. These two aspects are two sides of the same regeneration coin.

The GMB's message to the US casino giants thinking they may be able to import Wal-Mart or Mac type jobs paying the minimum wage and poor conditions is that that will not wash here. If that is part of their plans they can stay away from the UK.