

Gaming group plans six more casinos

Liverpool-based gaming group Stanley Leisure's expansion plans are snowballing, with a new venue now planned for Sheffield.

The firm, which announced it had also been granted permission for an GBP 8m casino in Liverpool two weeks ago, is to create a 30,000 sq ft venue in Sheffield's St Paul's Place after city magistrates approved the plans.

Stanley is going ahead with a further five new licence applications for casinos and three new licence applications in respect of moves in London, Edinburgh and Southampton.

The 30,000 sq ft casino in Sheffield will be Stanley's first in the city. The new Liverpool casino will be Stanley's third here. Stanley expects to open the Sheffield casino in early 2008 and the Liverpool casino in late 2008.

The 48-year-old company has focused on its casinos since selling its UK high street betting shops to rival William Hill last year for GBP 504m.

Shortly after the sale it revealed it was returning GBP 327m to its shareholders and investing GBP 100m to upgrade its casino estate.

In January, the firm splashed out almost GBP 30m on three casinos, two in Southend, Essex and one in Bristol. In the same month, Stanley announced the licence for its first casino in Nottingham. The company has budgeted GBP 7m and expects it to open towards the end of this year.

Stanley, which reported pre-tax profits of GBP 22.2m for the six months to the end of October, said the number of people attending its casinos outside London had jumped by more than

15% since laws requiring gamblers to be members for 24 hours before attending venues were scrapped.

The casino acquisitions consolidated the group's position as the biggest casino operator in the UK. It now has 44 outlets in total.

Leonard Steinberg founded Stanley Leisure in 1958, a few years after taking over his father's illegal betting shop in Northern Ireland.

Steinberg, who is now a lord, moved to England in the 1970s, and in 1979 moved the company's head office to Liverpool city centre. It is still based in Dale Street.