

# Pressure builds for casino review

Pressure was today intensifying on Tessa Jowell to reverse Blackpool's supercasino snub.

So far the Culture Secretary has stood firm in her belief the Casino Advisory Panel was right to recommend Manchester as the location for the UK's first Las Vegas-style gambling mecca.

But there's a growing rebellion by MPs and Lords.

Among the 101 MPs who have so far signed two Commons' Early Day Motions calling for the recommendation to be reviewed, four of them represent Manchester while 68 are Labour members.

The Government's majority in the Commons is just 65.

More than 9,000 people have collectively backed The Gazette's Sign Up For Blackpool campaign and a Downing Street petition supporting Blackpool's cause.

Meanwhile, seven members of the committee which originally scrutinised the criteria for the selection of the supercasino location are calling for it to be reviewed.

Even if it gets through the Commons, the House of Lords is seemingly ready to block Manchester's path.

Lord Tom McNally of Blackpool, leader of the Liberal Democrat peers, said: „In the Lords there is real cross-party outrage at the casino decision.

„I think the Government is going to get a very rough ride.

I've been working around Parliament for 40 years and I have never met a decision that has less popular support.

„I've been stopped by members of all parties in both houses

who have expressed complete bewilderment about how something that was supposed to be about regeneration is suddenly about a social experiment.

„Ministers do not like making U-turns, but the battle is not over yet.

„I just do not understand how she (Tessa Jowell) passed up the opportunity to make a decision that would have been genuinely nationally popular.

„There is an enormous goodwill for Blackpool.“

Lord McNally believes the Government would either refer the decision back to the joint Commons/Lords scrutiny committee which looked at the Draft Gambling Bill, or try to force the recommendation through both houses.

Lord Peter Blaker, who was Blackpool South MP for 28 years between 1964 and 1992, said: „People are not happy. My guess is most of the peers will be supporting Blackpool, apart from those who represent Manchester. If it comes to a debate in The Lords I will be lobbying my fellow peers and shouting Blackpool's case.“

Critics of the Manchester decision say the supercasino should be located in a resort or destination rather than in a residential area which they fear would be more susceptible to problem gambling.

Mrs Jowell held a meeting with the Fylde coast MPs last week. While she said she would listen to the arguments she was still mindful to back the CAP's decision.

She said: „I listened to the concerns they and others expressed carefully and we will consider whether there might be additional opportunities to discuss the panel's work. However, I believe the panel acted with rigour and integrity, and in accordance with its terms of reference, and I am minded to accept its recommendations.“

Blackpool North and Fleetwood MP Joan Humble said: „There are many members of the House of Commons who are unhappy with the process she is proposing, who do want this important issue to be re-examined before any vote.

„I hope she will listen.“

Blackpool South MP Gordon Marsden said it was not just Blackpool MPs.

He said: „The majority of names on the Early Day Motion are Labour and that should give government cause for thought. The momentum is increasing.“