

Blair blames Conservatives for stalemate over casino plans

London (Thomson Financial) – UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has blamed the opposition Conservative Party for the current impasse over the government's plan to introduce 17 casinos.

The plan fell apart earlier this year when the House of Lords rejected the proposal to build a 'super casino' in Manchester and 16 smaller venues around the country.

Blair told parliament the government will bring forward proposals to make sure the regional casinos 'are agreed and introduced'. He added that he believed the House of Commons, which voted in favour, should have the final say.

Manchester was chosen by an independent panel, beating favourite Blackpool. The decision has caused a row and a House of Lords committee criticised the selection process.

Blair said had the government's original intention to allow eight large venues been passed, many cities would have benefited from investment and regeneration.

'Personally I have never seen the reason why we should have Blackpool and Manchester pitted against each other,' he said during Prime Minister's questions.

'If the investment is there and (it is) able to be done, let's do both of them.'

'I think it is extraordinary you have got a situation where, as a result of what the Conservatives have done, they have put in jeopardy the casino in Manchester and they go around the streets of Blackpool telling people that they support the casino there, whereas if we had had our way originally,

without their intervention, we would have been able to do both.'

The Conservatives scuppered government plans to introduce a Bill that would pave the way for 24 casinos just before the 2005 General Election by threatening to talk the legislation out.

Faced with prospect of having to wait even longer to get the statute on the books, the government caved in and cut the number to 17.