

MPs hear Blackpool's plea

Blackpool's regeneration is a Government priority personally endorsed by Gordon Brown, a special Westminster debate was told.

Responding at the end of an hour-and-a-half long discussion in Whitehall about the future of the resort, a junior minister said he would take issues raised back to the heart of Government.

Ian Wright, Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said: „This is a major priority for my department and other departments with the personal endorsement of the Prime Minister, and I don't think that will be ending.“

A cross-party selection of MPs took part in the debate which called for cash to be ring-fenced for investment in seaside towns in the same way that grants had been used in the past to help deprived communities in inner cities, rural areas and regions affected by the closure of specific industries such as coalmining.

Blackpool South MP Gordon Marsden, who led the debate, said: „Some sort of special status as an investment zone is something the Government needs to consider seriously.“

He added: „Blackpool is not looking for a hand-out ... but we are looking for a leg up.“

He said although people had been passionate about wanting the supercasino licence, that did not rule out other possible forms of regeneration.

Blackpool North and Fleetwood MP Joan Humble called for more urgency from Government in tackling the problems and said funding for the tramway was vital.

She also stressed the need for a new conference centre so that

Blackpool could create the year-round economy it needed.

There was strong support from other MPs including the Fylde's Michael Jack, and Geraldine Smith, MP for Morecambe.

Afterwards Mr Marsden said: „The minister acknowledged the sense of frustration and urgency we have in Blackpool about getting on with things, and what I was pleased about was an understanding that what we're looking for is a leg up, not a hand-out.“