

# Lady Luck smiles as casino is saved

Sunderland's Gala Casino has been saved from closure.

The Echo exclusively revealed in January that Gala bosses were in talks with staff over plans to shut the venue at the heart of the High Street West regeneration area.

Workers were told of plans at a special meeting and the firm confirmed it had started a six-week period of consultation with workers with a view to closing the multimillion-pound venue.

That consultation period is now up – and Gala bosses have confirmed they have scrapped the closure plan.

„This was genuinely a period of consultation,“ said a company spokesman.

„We have decided to keep the venue open. It will not be closing.

„We are delighted about it, the staff are delighted about it and hopefully our customers will be pleased about it, too.“

Closing the casino, which opened in November 2005, would have been a severe blow to regeneration of the eastern end of High Street West.

The Gala venue is a major part of the Limelight leisure development, which also contains the multiscreen Empire cinema, restaurants Frankie and Benny's and Nando's and the My Legends sports bar.

Gentoo and Limelight developer Helios Properties is developing a GBP 12million leisure complex, with two floors of 10-pin bowling and 53 one and two-bedroom luxury apartments, next

door.

It was in August 2005 that Gala first unveiled plans for its new Sunderland casino.

The plan was to close its North Bridge Street casino, paving the way for a move to the new development in the city's River Quarter.

General manager Phil Tait promised: „The new casino will not only bring jobs to Sunderland, but will also boost the local economy by drawing people into the city from elsewhere.

„Most of the technology and gaming equipment has never been used anywhere before and a visit to the casino will be an all-round entertainment experience.

„I'm confident it will quickly become Sunderland's number one destination and once people see it they will fighting to book it for their Christmas parties.“

With 21 gaming tables – nearly triple the number at North Bridge Street – the new 28,000 sq ft casino offers games including American roulette, black jack, jackpot stud poker and brag.

The building houses 40 slot machines, dropping jackpots of up to GBP 4,000 a time, and an „e-lounge“ where gamblers can bet using electronic touchpad terminals.