

Government can help Blackpool

The Government minister in charge of Blackpool's regeneration has spoken of her 'responsibility' to the resort after its supercasino dream was shattered.

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears says she is looking at ways to make Blackpool's seafront People's Playground project a reality as well as boosting education, housing and shopping in the resort.

But she warned Blackpool it cannot focus on tourism alone to secure its future.

Speaking exclusively to The Gazette, Mrs Blears, who is heading the Government's Blackpool Task Force, said: „There is a big focus on Blackpool because I know how keen people were to get the casino so I feel a responsibility to make sure that we get long term regeneration here.

„I've set out a whole series of proposals for Blackpool.

„The biggest issue I think is around education and skills which will transform Blackpool for the long term. We have to make sure the people have got the skills for the new economy.

„Something like GBP 100m is being put together for rebuilding the schools, more higher education and skill centres here in Blackpool.

„I think every successful economy needs to play to its strengths and Blackpool's strength is tourism.

It has a unique reputation for fun and having a good time. That is important, but it can't be everything.— and particularly if our young people are going to get the jobs in IT, in creative industries in that new world that's coming, we've a responsibility to make sure Blackpool youngsters have the skills to get the jobs in that new economy.“

She added: „We’re going to look favourably at some of the proposals for the People’s Playground, which didn’t get its lottery bid. There are things we can do. I read that lottery bid in detail myself and I thought a lot of the ideas were very creative and innovative – it was tourism, but with a different slant.“

Resort leaders welcomed Mrs Blears’ comments, made at shopworkers’ union Usdaw’s annual conference.

Leader of Blackpool Council, Peter Callow, said: „I am quite hopeful we will be able to secure extra cash for the People’s Playground.

„We were so close to pulling off this deal which would have provided the full investment needed to deliver the People’s Playground.

„It was an imaginative scheme and a very worthwhile one.“

Blackpool South MP Gordon Marsden said: „I am pleased that Hazel Blears and other ministers are listening to the representations that Joan Humble and I have been making for Blackpool.“