

Lords pave the way for Teesside casino

All bets are on. Ambitious plans for a new casino in Middlesbrough have cleared the final Parliamentary hurdle.

Proposals for a large casino for the town yesterday won the approval of the House of Lords.

The plans have already been approved by the House of Commons.

It paves the way for Middlesbrough and seven other towns to have large casinos.

Dave Budd, Middlesbrough Council's Executive councillor for regeneration and economic development, said: "This is a significant outcome for Middlesbrough, although there is still much work to be done.

"Nevertheless, we can now move forward with our plans for a large casino and potential developers will also be able to begin working on their plans."

Moves to allow the large and small casinos were thrown into disarray last March when the House of Lords rejected the plans.

This was mainly because they included the proposal for a supercasino in Manchester.

But the supercasino has since been removed from the measures.

The approval in the Lords clears the way for the process of inviting bids from potential operators and selecting one to develop the casino.

Supporters say such a development would bring hundreds of jobs to the town.

A large casino will be able to include up to 150 slot machines with jackpots up to GBP 4,000.

Casino operators have already expressed interest in the idea.

A spokesman for the Rank Group, which owns Grosvenor Casinos, said: "We believe that a new casino is a welcome opportunity for Middlesbrough and look forward to learning more about how the council intends to hold an open and fair competition to decide where in the town the casino should be located."

But not everyone is in favour of the casino plan.

Middlesbrough Council of Faiths has voiced concerns about the social consequences of a large new casino.

Chairman Michael Wright said: "People with money to risk, and who know when they have reached their limit, can mostly cope with the dangers of gambling.

"Our chief concern is not for them, but for people who are lured into a situation which can only increase their difficulties."

He said they were "very concerned" about the possible social consequences to different groups, including thousands of students.

Middlesbrough Council of Faiths is holding a meeting on the casino next Thursday, May 22, at 7.30pm at 49 Grange Road, Middlesbrough.