

The Statement in respect of question 3C is a joint statement by the North West Regional Assembly and the Northwest Regional Development Agency

Panel Question (i)

Is the approach to casinos in Policy W8 of the draft RSS appropriate?

1.1 The process for determining the location of the pilot regional casino has been clearly set out at the national level. The national policy statement published on 16th December 2004¹:

- Introduced the provision for the establishment of an Independent Panel to assist the Secretary of State in determining the location of casinos
- Required the Panel to have regard to Regional Planning Bodies in determining suitable broad location for Regional Casinos.

1.2 In light of these requirements it was important for the region to be in a position to provide clear advice to the Independent Panel to assist their decision making process. The study commissioned by the Northwest Regional Development Agency, in partnership with North West Regional Assembly and Government Office North West, was undertaken to inform this process. Details of the study are set out in the Technical Appendix to submitted draft RSS².

1.3 The policy approach set out seeks to take forward the findings of this study, recognising that, when considering economic and tourist benefits to deprived groups equally, Blackpool and Manchester are ranked at roughly the same level. The report goes on to suggest that it is difficult not to assign a higher priority to the opportunity to restructure the less diversified economy of Blackpool against the opportunity for localised regeneration in the context of a more diversified, buoyant economy in Manchester.

1.4 Whilst it may be viewed as inappropriate for RSS to assign this priority, it is our view that there is nothing in the legislation, or subsequent policy statements, which restrict Regional Planning Bodies from taking this approach, whilst recognising that the Panel will take the final view on the locations recommend to the Secretary of State. This has been confirmed by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS)³.

1.5 The policy is appropriate when considered in the context of the pilot nature of the first regional casino. Unless changes are made to legislation the development of further casinos will not be permitted until the development of the pilot casino has been reviewed. The current indication is that the Government will ask the Gambling Commission to make an assessment of the impact of the new casinos permitted by the Gambling Act 2005 no earlier than three years after the award of the first premises licence⁴.

¹ Casinos: Statement of National Policy, DCMS, December 2004

² Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England – Technical Appendix January 2006 (para 3.257 – 3.268)

³ Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England – Technical Appendix January 2006 Annex 3.3 (pg 184- 186)

⁴ Richard Cabon, Hansard Written Answers, Monday 20th March 2006: Column 13W & Tuesday 13th June 2006: Column 1073W.

1.6 A minor wording change is suggested by Assembly officers to paragraph 8.33⁵ to clarify that opportunities for casino development in other locations, relates specifically to opportunities for regional casino development to reflect the content of Policy W8, and therefore is not intended to preclude the development of large and small casinos.

1.7 The Northwest Regional Development Agency welcomes and fully supports Policy W8 which reflects the support expressed for Blackpool as the priority location for Regional Casino development in the Regional Economic Strategy⁶.

⁵ Briefing Paper 20 - Suggested Wording Changes to Draft RSS, NWRA, September 2006

⁶ 'Implement the Blackpool Masterplan, including Blackpool as the priority location for regional casino development in the UK', Northwest Regional Economic Strategy 2006 – Transformational Action 48 (pg 35) (**ECO14**)