

Fury over Scots casino scheme

Plans to build a new casino in Stranraer have been described as „contemptible“ by an Ulster clergyman, amid fears that a new 750sq m gambling outlet in the Scottish port town – a short journey by ferry could have a negative impact on the province’s economy.

Plans for the new small-scale casino were revealed yesterday following news that Manchester had been recommended as the location of Britain’s first ever ‘super-casino’.

Eight licences for large casinos and eight for smaller venues, including Stranraer, were also recommended by the Casino Advisory Panel.

The proposed outlet could house up to 80 gaming machines offering GBP 4,000 maximum jackpots, prompting fears that it could lead to an increase in gambling addiction among Ulster punters attracted by the lure of a quick win.

„I find the whole thing most contemptible,“ said the Rev Ian Brown, Chairman of Government and Morals Committee for the Free Presbyterian Church.

„The Government announces this with a big fanfare saying it is liberalising the law and it’s a blessing for the people.

„But it causes untold hardship.

„How much money is the ordinary taxpayer going to be compelled to pay in order to help someone through the crisis of addiction?

„The Government seems determined to raise a little bit more revenue for itself to generate a whole swathe of addicts.

„It’s quite deplorable, it’s another attack on the moral fabric of society and the government just seems absolutely

determined on tearing society apart.“

Adrian Eastwood, from Eastwood Bookmakers, which has over 50 outlets across Northern Ireland, said he expected such a facility would „flourish“ due to the lack of casinos in Northern Ireland.

„Obviously they are going capitalise on whatever business comes from Northern Ireland, which would be substantial,“ he said.

„There’s no question that it will take money out of Northern Ireland, which potentially takes it out of our pockets also and all people involved in the gambling industry.

„There is different gambling legislation on the mainland than applies in Northern Ireland, so in the foreseeable future there’s no possibility of a casino here.

„As long as that remains the case, if this Stranraer one goes ahead then they will certainly flourish on the back of Northern Ireland.“

The news has been broadly welcomed by ferry company Stena Line, however, which operates regular services to Stranraer from Belfast.

Ian Baillie, the route marketing manager for Stena Line, said: „While we do not have the full details of the casino development in Stranraer at the moment, I do understand that it is part of a proposed major redevelopment of the waterfront area.

„There is no doubt that such large-scale investment is sure to be good for business.

„Dumfries and Galloway is a very attractive part of Scotland and anything that encourages people from Northern Ireland to take more short breaks there is to be welcomed.“

The findings of the Casino Advisory Panel will be considered by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell before going to a Commons vote.