

# Brown may put casinos at bottom of the pack

Plans for Britain's first Las Vegas-style casino in Manchester face months of delay as doubts last night grew over Gordon Brown's willingness to revive the project when he becomes prime minister.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport said no decision would be made public on the future of the plans for 17 casinos until after the Scottish, Welsh and English local elections on May 3.

Further delay is expected because of a growing paralysis in Whitehall as Government departments prepare for Tony Blair's resignation as prime minister and the expected handover of power to Mr Brown.

The Chancellor is known to have doubts about a gambling explosion. In his Budget last week he slapped a hefty tax on casino profits.

As a leading supporter of Mr Blair, Miss Jowell is thought unlikely to feature in Mr Brown's first Cabinet and after the disarray over casino policy, she may well be replaced as Culture Secretary.

Labour MPs reported a mood of despondency, with one ministerial source suggesting that there was a feeling after the defeat that „we could just drop the whole thing“. While the Government might make another attempt to get the Gambling Order through Parliament after the May elections, one minister said: „Whether there is the political will or not is another matter.“

The plans were thrown out by the Lords by three votes – after scraping through the Commons despite a Labour rebellion. Miss

Jowell admitted there was „no plan B“ as the whole package had, in effect, been sent back to the drawing board.

At yesterday's meeting of the Cabinet, she made clear that she was determined to find a way to press ahead with the plan for 17 new casinos.

However, there was growing speculation at Westminster that Manchester may yet lose the super casino – and Blackpool once again appears to be in the running.

One option would be for the Government to have a separate vote on the proposal for 16 smaller casinos in other towns across the country, which would almost certainly be approved by both Houses of Parliament, but to bow to demands for a rethink of the super casino location.

On a visit to Manchester yesterday, Mr Blair came close to admitting defeat on the giant casino plan by saying that the Lords had stopped „millions of pounds of investment“ in the city.

„I hope the people who voted against it understand they are not going to stop anyone betting,“ he said. „They are just going to stop hundreds of millions of pounds worth of investment in Manchester.“

Last night, sources close to Mr Brown were anxious not to rock the boat or seem to be manoeuvring to kill off the super-casino scheme.

It was pointed out that the Chancellor had urged Labour MPs on Wednesday to support the Government motion. But one observer said that what Mr Brown advised for the sake of party unity „does not necessarily reflect what he will do when he is in Number 10“.