

PENELOPE, VISCOUNTESS COBHAM
CHAIRMAN OF THE BRITISH CASINO ASSOCIATION



“WE HAVE TO SORT OUT THE DETAILS OF THE 2005 ACT”

Penelope, Viscountess Cobham has been Chairman of the British Casino Association (BCA) for 5 years now. These are exciting times for the Association and Viscountess Cobham is focussing on working out the details of the 2005 Gaming Act, to benefit the sector as much as possible.

Where were you born? How did you become Chairman of the BCA?

I was born in Manchester in 1954. My professional background is in the tourism and leisure industry, and I am Deputy Chairman of VisitBritain, the British tourism board. I also have government experience, having worked in Westminster. Five years ago it was proposed that I become Chairman of the BCA, because a revision of the 1968 Act was expected. My experience in the tourism and leisure sectors and my understanding of government matters made them decide on me as Chairman. They wanted somebody not related to the sector.



The British Casinos Association in Grosvenor Gardens

Do you have other occupations?

Yes, many. For instance I am chairman of two radio stations: 100.7 Heart FM and Galaxy 102.2 FM.

How many Casinos does the BCA represent?

We have 124 associated Casinos, 90% of the total number of Casinos in Britain.

What is the main role of the BCA?

Our main role is to represent and defend the interests of the industry. This is a very exciting time for us, a time of changes, like when the 1968 Act became the 2005 Act. We



are involved in many matters, such as revising taxation and the application of the European directive. We have a Council, which meets every month, a Tax Committee, and a New Games Committee.

What are the current challenges facing the BCA?

There are many. Actually, one real challenge will come when the power to grant licences for new Casinos changes from

the Courts to the local authorities. This is already the case in Scotland, but not in the rest of the UK, where there is no experience of Casino licensing.

What is the main problem facing the Casino Industry in the UK?

After working on the new Act for five years, it now covers almost all aspects of the industry. The next issue to be dealt with will be taxation. This matter is absolutely critical for the future of the industry, and we have already made great progress in this regard.

Is there any idea where the new Casino licences will go?

The Advisory Panel will be appointed this year, and will advise the Secretary of State, hopefully by late 2006, after agreeing on the criteria for selecting the areas. We won't know until then how the areas or the operators will be selected. The existing Clubs will have a hard time of it as, presumably, they will have to be assessed as regards what they can offer their local areas. They



Penelope, Viscountess Cobham with a copy of this magazine

cannot submit any proposals; they don't have the mechanism for it, and can't submit proposals to the local authorities. This is a challenge for us. As regards operators, some local authorities have already chosen an operator with whom to negotiate. The official line is that once a local authority has been chosen to house one of the 17 new Casinos, they will put out a tender to select the most suitable operator. However, it is not clear to me, if they have already signed a legal agreement, whether they will be forced to tear it up and put it out to tender instead. I am mystified as to how the process can be open. Some local areas which have not yet agreed anything will be chosen for one of the 17 Casinos.

What are your plans for the future?

We will continue to represent the interests of the industry as we have done so far. Certain new issues, such as social responsibility, will be dealt with specifically in the new licences. At present, there is a voluntary social responsibility code, and other codes covering other aspects. This is an exciting period, with its ups and downs, challenges and political reactions. Times are changing and there are many details to be hammered out. The 2005 Act gives a general idea and a framework, but our job is to work out the specific details.

