

City bets on town to win casino battle

City Hall leaders are planning to turn down a unique opportunity for Norwich to become the new Las Vegas of the East and be the location for one of the country's new casinos.

Under last year's Gambling Act, three new types of casino will be allowed to operate.

Throughout the country, one new regional casino will be permitted along with eight new large and eight new small casinos.

All local authorities have been asked to consider whether they wish to be considered as locations for them. But the Liberal Democrat executive at City Hall is planning to turn down the offer when it is asked on Wednesday whether to get council officers to put in a bid for a licence for one of 17 casinos.

The council's deputy leader Hereward Cooke said the council wanted to back Great Yarmouth's bid for a casino instead.

A special advisory panel has been set up to recommend to the Culture Secretary the areas where the casinos would best be located.

One of the main criteria will be that the areas picked are in need of regeneration.

At the moment, Blackpool is in the driving seat for the single regional casino, although Great Yarmouth has not given up hope entirely. Mr Cooke said: „We have considered whether it is right for Norwich to have a casino and we have informally decided we would be well advised to support Yarmouth in their application for a casino.“

Because the casino site needed to be in an area of

regeneration, the executive did not feel Norwich qualified.

“There might be other places in the East of England that compete with Great Yarmouth for it. But I am sure Great Yarmouth will have a strong use for it.”

The so-called super casino will hold 1,250 unlimited jackpot gaming machines and be 5,000 sq m in size. There is a growing belief the Government will seek to amend gambling legislation passed in the run-up to the General Election to permit at least a further four such regional casinos.

Great Yarmouth MP Tony Wright said: „We are delighted that Norwich will be backing our bid for a casino, it is excellent news and it would be very good for our economy.“