

Conservatives will oppose rise in number of super-casinos

The gaming industry's hopes for more Las Vegas-style super-casinos will be dashed tomorrow when the Conservatives rule out their support for plans to increase the number of properties.

Only one super-casino will be built following changes to gambling laws although the government has indicated it would be prepared to increase the number if there were sufficient cross-party support.

However, the Tories will outline their opposition to an increase at a special seminar that will be attended by groups such as the Salvation Army and GamCare, which helps problem gamblers.

In a letter sent to Tory MPs this week, Hugo Swire, the shadow culture secretary, called on his colleagues to stress their opposition to more super-casinos.

Mr Swire says there „are still hardly any details about how this legislation will be implemented, despite the potential effect it could have on society“.

„It is essential that we highlight our concerns about the government's failings, and ensure that we do not see a repeat of the implementation of the licensing laws which had a disastrous effect on many local authorities,“ he adds.

„For that reason we will be reaffirming our commitment to oppose any increases in the number of regional casinos until the pilot project has been properly and thoroughly assessed.“

Richard Caborn, the gambling minister, said last month that

the government was prepared to increase the number „if those on the opposition benches say that they will reconsider moving from one to a number between one and eight. It is right to move forward in that way“.

However, one Tory MP said last night: „We want to underline the fact that the government could revisit the numbers under the current legislation whenever it wanted to.“

The tough anti-casino stance comes as some Conservative-led councils, such as Coventry, have called on the party to back an increase in the number of super-casinos. Ken Taylor, leader of Coventry council, said last week a super-casino could „provide a step-change in the level and quality of regeneration to a whole region“. He added that a GBP 113m scheme in Coventry being backed by the council would generate 1,800 jobs in a deprived Midlands area.

International casino operators such as MGM Mirage, Caesars Entertainment and Kerzner International are also believed to be backing an increase in the number of super-casinos. They have struck deals with some local authorities with the aim of building casinos. UK operators, such as Rank, Stanley Leisure and London Clubs International, would also benefit from an increase.