

# Not giving up the casino battle

The fight to bring Britain's first regional casino to Coventry is not over – even though the city didn't make the shortlist.

City council leader Ken Taylor said last night the body would be doing all it could to appeal against the exclusion.

And Coventry North-west MP Geoffrey Robinson has already written to Prof Stephen Crow, chairman of the Casino Advisory Panel which made the choice, asking for an urgent meeting.

The panel yesterday announced the eight areas now vying to become the only pilot supercasino in the UK.

They include the Millennium Dome and Wembley Stadium in London; Blackpool, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield.

The National Exhibition Centre also missed out on a supercasino.

Cllr Taylor he was „shocked, gutted, disappointed“ by the decision to drop Coventry's well-advanced plans for a casino at the Ricoh Arena.

He said: „We remain absolutely convinced Coventry must be on the list and will be looking into this decision further with the advisory panel as a matter of urgency.“

Mr Robinson said: „We're taking it up immediately with the Government and with the Casino Advisory Panel. I think what's very shocking is there is no West Midlands site included.“

American casino operator Isle of Capri is already fitting out a small casino at the Ricoh, complete with a GBP 6 million entrance staircase fit for a larger casino.

Cllr Taylor said as far as he knew, Isle of Capri was committed to staying at the Ricoh Arena where it has reserved enough space for a supercasino.

„They’ve reassured us in the past they will continue on the site. They have got a commitment to the site with facilities currently being built and, in their words, they’re ,in it for the long term‘.

„They’re not going to walk away – they’ll keep pursuing it to get a bigger one.“

Dr Brian Wood-Scawen, chairman of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships, said: „This continues a record of poor decisions about major infrastructure projects following on from national football stadium and the Millennium Dome – both built in the wrong place.

„The regional casino would have created thousands of jobs for the city and would have been a great antidote following recent job losses at Jaguar and Peugeot.“

Coventry North-east MP Bob Ainsworth said he was not particularly surprised at the decision but would be prepared to help the council lobby further.

He said: „I’m sure Coventry can cope without it. A far, far bigger decision, as far as I’m concerned, is getting the site at Ansty developed for a high technology medical science park.“