

Wembley pulls out of super-casino race after council decision

Wembley, one of the frontrunners to host the first super-casino, has withdrawn from the contest after a surprise decision by Brent council last night.

The move tilts the odds towards the Millennium Dome in south London winning the right to build a giant casino, only one of which will be allowed by the government. The contest, which had narrowed to a field of eight locations, including Glasgow, Blackpool and Sheffield, has become increasingly bitter.

The vying local authorities are next week due to give evidence to the casino advisory panel, which is to choose the location of the project. The Wembley casino would have been built by Harrah's Entertainment, the US gaming group, on land near the new Wembley stadium. The group planned to build a 650,000 sq ft scheme, with room for 1,250 unlimited jackpot slot machines, on a wider regeneration site controlled by Quintain, the property developer. Quintain is also developing the land around the Millennium Dome, in Greenwich, although it does not own the dome. The casino at the dome would be built by Anschutz Entertainment Group, the US company.

The prospects of a Wembley super-casino slipped after a political change of control at Brent council this summer when a Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition replaced the previous Labour administration which backed the scheme.

The project was expected to bring 2,000 jobs to the borough, with more than half going to locals. It was also thought likely to bring large numbers of tourists. But a „social study“ of the potential impact of the scheme, commissioned by the new administration, raised fears of problem gambling,

traffic congestion and health problems, such as depression.

A separate survey of more than 3,600 local residents found that 67 per cent were opposed to the casino.

There was a unanimous vote last night against the project by eight executive members of Brent council.

Without political support, Harrah's project will not be considered by the casino advisory panel.

The panel has already rejected numerous towns and cities including Coventry, which is thought to have considered an appeal.