

# Supercasino set back by problem gambling

Glasgow's hopes of landing the UK's first supercasino suffered a setback yesterday after official research said it would increase problem gambling, especially in deprived areas across the city.

Ministers also refused to support the bid, sticking to their neutral position of being „not opposed in principle“, despite the potential for up to 3000 jobs.

A Scottish Executive spokesman said that, although an economic boost from a regional casino was a given, ministers had concerns about the wider social impact.

It is understood Labour ministers were relatively keen on a supercasino in Scotland, but their Liberal Democrat colleagues were worried about gambling addiction, and so the cabinet compromised by adopting a neutral stance.

However, the executive's submission to the UK Casino Advisory Panel will be dominated by research on social problems. The social impact is detailed in a 118-page report of specially commissioned research, while the economic case merits only a couple of pages compiled by the Enterprise Department run by LibDem minister Nicol Stephen.

Glasgow is the only Scottish bid still in the running for the sole supercasino licence, with four candidate sites at Ibrox, Glasgow Harbour, the SECC, and an area near St Enoch Square. The other contenders are Brent, Cardiff, Sheffield, Newcastle, Manchester, Blackpool and the Millennium Dome at Greenwich.

The social impact report says there is much hype about casinos and the evidence shows they are „neither as economically beneficial as supporters claim, nor as socially damaging as

opponents fear“.

That said, it concludes casinos are associated with high rates of problem gambling. It suggests the large, easily accessible casino foreseen in the Glasgow bid would cause problems among local people, especially those in poverty, the poorly educated and the unemployed. However, it would also have the potential to attract tourists, „resulting in lower social costs relative to economic benefits“.

Around 3% of the UK population currently visit casinos, although this is expected to increase to 10% with liberalisation of the gaming laws, allowing more high-paying slot machines in venues. In the US, casinos are visited by 27% of the population.

Around 5-8% of those who do visit casinos in the UK are seen as „problem gamblers“, meaning it disrupts their friends, family and work, and can spiral into debt, domestic violence, crime, bankruptcy, and suicide.

Mr Stephen said the executive had stayed neutral as it felt the individual councils applying for casino licences were best placed to weigh the pros and cons. Steven Purcell, the Labour leader of Glasgow City Council, lamented the lack of executive support and said safeguards would be put in place to help gambling addicts.