

# NEC unveils its casino plan

The NEC Group has used Mipim – the world’s largest commercial property showcase – to unveil what the future could look like at the UK’s busiest exhibition centre as it starts the process of selecting a partner to create a casino-based leisure development at the venue.

Senior figures from the West Midlands-based management company that operates The NEC and NEC Arena, together with the ICC and National Indoor Arena in central Birmingham, were in Cannes looking to engage with potential partners to develop the first phase of their vision – a gaming and leisure complex.

The proposal for a joint casino and hotel development, with supporting leisure facilities, follows the UK Casino Advisory Panel’s recent recommendation that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council should have the ability to grant a Large Casino Licence, under the UK Gambling Act 2005.

It is expected that Solihull will run a competition for the licence should the Advisory Panel’s recommendations be agreed by Parliament.

The NEC has already announced its intention to take part in that competition. Future phases of regeneration will focus on The NEC’s lakeside area, with a number of possibilities being considered.

One idea could be the development of architecturally vibrant buildings known as „expo pavilions“ where organisations will be able to permanently showcase their brands. Further conference and training facilities will also be evaluated.

The NEC Group says that all plans under consideration will complement the more temporary opportunities that are currently available to event organisers and exhibitors.

NEC Group chief operating officer John Hornby yesterday joined the strong Birmingham delegation at Mipim.

As well as supporting the broader Birmingham presence, the NEC Group will also be looking for potential developer/operators to promote and undertake a vibrant gaming-anchored leisure development, complementing existing facilities and activity on the NEC site.

Mr Hornby said: „This is the next exciting phase of NEC Group development. After demonstrating vision and leadership by creating The NEC in the 1970s and then adding additional halls together with the city centre venues in the 1980s and 1990s, The NEC Group and its shareholder Birmingham City Council, are now considering the third generation of development on the Solihull site to ensure that The NEC remains the UK and Europe’s busiest events venue.

„Our overarching vision is to create a destination with a particular focus on the corporate market, whilst also leveraging the growing consumer market. We will be capitalising on The NEC’s unrivalled programme of trade and consumer exhibitions and the hundreds of live music events showcased at the NEC Arena every year.“

The NEC Group is expected to formally engage with potential gaming and leisure complex partners in the second half of 2007, when it will work hard to win the Solihull Large Casino licence. No firm plans will be developed for future phases until a large casino on The NEC site has been confirmed.