

Blackpool to shed beds after casino setback

The poor summer season for Britain's seaside resorts has taken its toll on Blackpool as the town winds down for the winter break with 220 hotels and guesthouses, worth a total of GBP 57m, on the market.

The resort is looking to reduce bedroom capacity from its current levels of 72,000 after losing the bid for the UK's supercasino – now scrapped by Gordon Brown – and a slow summer.

Jacqui Morris, company secretary for tourism body Stay Blackpool, said: „We have too much bedstock and need to reduce that number – a lot of other seaside resorts have gone through the same process. The casino bid has had an effect because there was a lot of speculative buying going on, but now that the supercasino is very unlikely to happen in Blackpool, a lot of people are selling.“

Morris insisted that the sell-off didn't reflect a wider malaise in the area. „It's not as bad as everybody thinks,“ she said. „The 220 hotels might seem high, but as a percentage of the 1,700 hotels actively operating in Blackpool it's not that high.“

David Nolan, principal at Blackpool-based commercial property agent Key's, said the properties would be on some agents' books for at least nine months. „The hotel market, as with other property markets, is slowing down,“ he said. „If you're looking to buy a hotel in Blackpool you wouldn't do it now as your major earning season is Easter and beyond. Now we just have to wait for people to acquire the capital.“

There is still some hotel development in the pipeline, however, with budget group Travelodge scouting for a third

site near the town, having begun construction on two properties on the promenade. The first, a 124-bedroom hotel, will open in December, while the second, a 79-bedroom hotel, will open in November next year.