

Middlesbrough casino plans in motion

The cards have started to be dealt in the process to bring a large casino to Middlesbrough.

Operators in the UK and abroad will be invited to bid to win the licence to operate the large casino in the town.

The successful bidder will be chosen by Middlesbrough Council's licensing committee.

Middlesbrough was one of eight towns and cities in the UK chosen by the Government to be the location of a large casino.

It will have a gaming area of between 1,500sq m and 3,500sq m and will have up to 150 gaming machines with a maximum jackpot of GBP 4,000.

Eight towns, including Scarborough, are getting small casinos which will have up to 80 gaming machines with a maximum jackpot of GBP 4,000.

Details of the process to be followed in awarding a licence have now been reported to Dave Budd, Middlesbrough Council's Executive councillor for regeneration and economic development.

Over the next six to eight months the council will be revising its policy in relation to the Gambling Act to take account of the opportunity for a large casino to be sited in the town. There will be a period of consultation before the full council is asked to approved the revised policy.

When the revised policy is in place bids will be invited from companies wanting to operate the large casino.

In the first stage the council's licensing committee will

assess each application against the council's policy.

A number of operators are expected to meet the eligibility criteria and they will then be assessed in a second stage which will consider how their proposal would benefit the area in ways such as contributing to regeneration efforts.

It is likely to be 2010 before the successful bidder is chosen.

Cllr Budd said since Middlesbrough first entered into the running to bring a big casino to the town, many things had changed.

He said: "Perhaps a casino is less important than it was but it could still be an important part of the regeneration jigsaw. We will have an enormous degree of control on what happens with this. If no one comes forward with what we want, we will not have a large casino."

Efforts to bring a large-scale casino to Middlesbrough have been under way for three years.

Middlesbrough did bid to land the jackpot prize of a supercasino but that was allocated to Manchester.

However the supercasino idea was blocked in the House of Lords and the Government decided to allow eight large and eight small casinos.

The idea has not met with universal approval in Middlesbrough.

Among those voicing opposition has been the Middlesbrough Council of Faiths which is concerned about the social impact a large casino would have.

It has also questioned if a large casino is an appropriate vehicle to deliver regeneration.