

# Supercasino bid winner to be named

Bidders competing for Britain's first Las Vegas-style supercasino will this week learn who has hit the jackpot.

The Millennium Dome and Blackpool are tipped as the two frontrunners amongst the seven shortlisted areas.

Bookmakers Paddy Power changed its odds on Friday to make Blackpool the favourite ahead of Greenwich. It said the Dome – now called The O2 – had fallen into second place after a flurry of bets were placed on the seaside resort.

The other shortlisted cities are Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield. Whichever bidder wins will create a casino at least 5,000 square metres large, housing up to 1,250 unlimited jackpot gaming machines.

The Casino Advisory Panel (CAP) will put forward its recommendations to Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell on Tuesday morning. At the same time it will recommend venues for another eight large and eight small casinos.

The supercasino site must have „clear potential“ for regenerating the area through the creation of hotels, restaurants, bars, entertainment venues and other facilities, according to the Government's criteria. But critics say building more casinos will fuel the nation's gambling habit and create more addicts.

The Millennium Dome's bid sparked controversy after it emerged John Prescott had stayed at the Colorado ranch of US billionaire owner Philip Anschutz. The Deputy Prime Minister failed in his duty as an MP by not immediately declaring his July 2005 visit, the parliamentary Standards and Privileges Committee found.

Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) last summer denied it was starting secret preparatory work to turn the south London site into a casino.

The Dome emerged as a front-runner in the race for supercasino status after the CAP's first round of judging last year. It scored 67 points out of a possible 80 when marked according to the CAP's set of eight criteria. Glasgow came second with 66 points, followed by Blackpool at 65 and Sheffield at 62.

But Nick Crowther, deputy head of the CAP secretariat, said Tuesday's announcement was not a foregone conclusion. „The seven shortlisted areas all have a chance of being selected,“ he said. „The Panel is at pains to point out that not too much emphasis is put on those early rankings. They were merely to assist them in the shortlisting process.“