

Odds stack up against Manchester securing first licence for supercasino

One of the world's leading experts on gambling will this week denounce the decision to award the first supercasino licence to Manchester.

Prof Peter Collins, who helped to draw up the Government's gambling legislation in 2003, will tell a committee of peers that the conclusions reached by the Casino Advisory Panel (CAP) about the merits of bids by the city and its six rivals were „often arbitrary, highly disputable, and based on reasoning which is frequently inconsistent, superficial and ill-informed“.

He will also claim that the five panel members, who were appointed by the Government, lacked sufficient expertise to realise that much of the evidence presented to them by the bid teams was based on „dishonest“ research.

He will suggest that the panel was blinded by the „presentational brilliance“ of the Manchester bid, which included a „highly professional assault“ on the application from Blackpool.

The scathing assessment from Prof Collins, the Director of the Study of Gambling at Salford University, says: „The CAP was composed of intelligent, honest and diligent people who could not be expected to possess the complex and detailed knowledge of how the casino business works or under what circumstances casinos can be regulated as to minimise social costs and maximise public benefits.“

Prof Collins, who supports the concept of supercasinos and is a trustee of GamCare, an industry-funded charity, initially

welcomed Manchester's victory. He now believes that January's decision failed to take into account overwhelming evidence that the licence should be given to a resort rather than a city. He also claims that the panel wrongly allowed the Manchester team to include an attack on Blackpool, which had emerged as the late favourite to win the licence.

The committee of peers is scrutinising an „order“ submitted by Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary, to allow the decision to be rubber-stamped. It will also hear submissions from several of the unsuccessful bidders.

Opposition to a supercasino in Manchester, which has provided evidence supporting its case to Tuesday's hearing, is growing.

An early day motion condemning the decision has been signed by 102 MPs. Both houses of Parliament are expected to vote before Easter on whether to accept the decision.

A spokesman for Manchester City Council said that Prof Collins was entitled to his opinion but insisted Manchester was the right location for the complex.