New Nuclear Power Stations

Hinkley Point, Somerset

The UK's energy policy is set out in the National Policy Statements (NPS) that were ratified in Parliament in July 2011. The NPS says that new nuclear power stations would play a vitally important role in providing reliable electricity supplies and a secure and diverse energy mix as the UK makes the transition to a low carbon economy. The NPS identifies eight sites, including Hinkley Point, as potentially suitable for new nuclear by 2025.

Why new nuclear power stations?

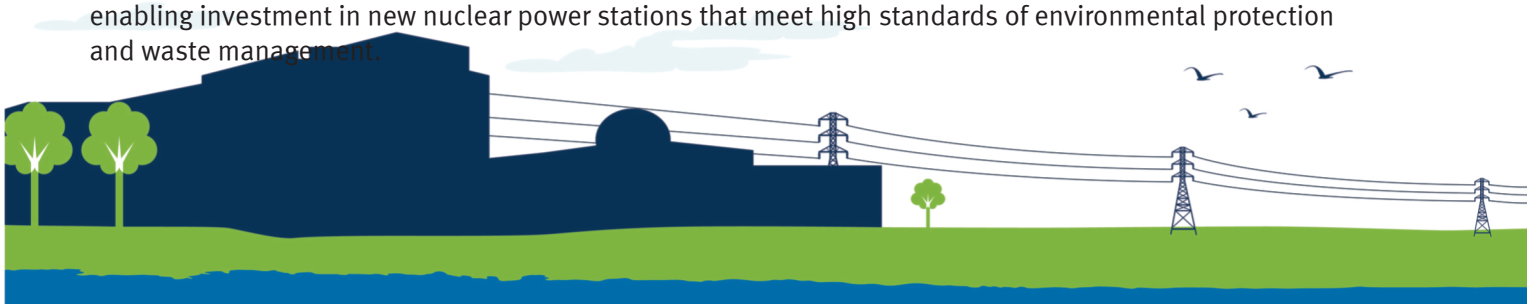
Tackling climate change and ensuring the security of future energy supplies are two key energy challenges we face in the UK. Old nuclear and coal-fired power stations are closing, reducing the security of the energy supply we need for everyday life, and climate change is a big concern for the future. Government's strategy for moving towards a de-carbonised, diverse electricity sector by 2050 includes three key elements: renewables, fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage, and new nuclear generation. The Government believes that new nuclear power stations provide low carbon generation, will increase the resilience of the UK's energy system and will be economically competitive with other forms of generating technology. Government policy is that new nuclear power should be able to contribute as much as possible to the UK's new capacity.

Why Hinkley Point?

Hinkley Point's first nuclear power station, Hinkley Point A, operated from 1965 to 2000 and is being decommissioned. Hinkley Point B produces up to 840 megawatts of electricity, enough to meet the needs of about one million homes. It is due to stop generating in 2016 although EDF Energy is seeking to extend the station's generating life. Hinkley Point was nominated by EDF Energy as a potential site for a new nuclear power station when the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) was developing its NPS. DECC consulted widely on the draft NPS before deciding that the site should be included. EDF Energy's and Centrica's joint venture company, NNB Generation Company Limited (NNB GenCo), is proposing to build a twin reactor station that, if approved, would generate 3,200 megawatts of electricity, enough to meet the electricity needs of over three million homes.

What is your role?

We are the principal environmental regulator of the nuclear industry in England and Wales. We regulate disposals and discharges of radioactive waste, discharges of cooling water and operation of standby generators. We also regulate other environmental matters such as surface waters and effluents during construction and we provide advice to others, e.g. on flood and coastal risk management. With the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), who regulate safety and security, we recognise and welcome our role in enabling investment in new nuclear power stations that meet high standards of environmental protection and waste management.



Have you assessed the reactor design that could be built at Hinkley Point?

We, with ONR, have completed our planned assessment of the UK EPR TM reactor design that is proposed by NNB GenCo for Hinkley Point. This is to make sure that the design would be acceptable if built in the UK and that people and the environment would be properly protected. Our assessment includes its potential environmental impacts, including the radioactive wastes it would create and the discharges that it would make. There are a number of Issues that remain to be resolved. We are using this work to inform our decisions on site specific environmental permit applications from potential operators.

How are you involved with the proposed new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point?

Any company that wants to operate a nuclear power station will have to show that it can build, operate and decommission it safely, securely, protect the environment and manage radioactive waste. It will need to apply to us for a number of permits needed for construction and operation, including those for radioactive discharges, cooling water discharges and the operation of stand-by generators.
We are making decisions about applications from NNB GenCo for three key operational environmental permits for Hinkley Point C - for disposals and discharges of radioactive wastes, for operation of standby generators and for discharges of cooling water and liquid effluent into the Bristol Channel. We decide if permits should be issued and, if so, what conditions should apply. Our work also includes;

- providing information about the environment around potential sites so developers can make sound decisions;
- advising on the scope of developers' Environmental Impact Assessments and providing information for the assessments;
- regulating site investigation works that are needed to check sites are suitable for development;
- providing pre-application advice;
- responding to consultations run by Government, developers and local authorities;
- advising on flood and coastal risk matters for the proposed power station site and other sites where "associated" development is also proposed, for example to provide workers' accommodation or park and ride facilities;
- providing advice and information to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) about our regulatory matters;
- regulating sites for environmental matters during their construction, operation and decommissioning.

What are you doing on the key local issues?

We are engaging in the Planning Inspectorate's examination of NNB GenCo's application for a Development Consent Order for the site and associated development sites such as Combwich Wharf. This includes attending hearings and providing written submissions. Our on-site Environment Officers are working with NNB GenCo to ensure that the environment is protected during asbestos remediation works.

What happens next?

We are consulting on our draft decisions for NNB GenCo's operational permit applications. Once we have carefully considered any comments received we will make our decisions on whether or not permits should be issued. NNB GenCo has applied to the ONR for a Nuclear Site Licence and the ONR is now reviewing it. NNB GenCo has applied to the PINs for a Development Consent Order for the site. The PINs is expected to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State by the end of 2012. The Secretary of State's decision should follow within three months.

How can I have my say?

Understanding and listening to the views of local people is very important. We consult with the public on both the applications we receive for operational permits and our draft decision documents. We also consulted on our Generic Design Assessment of the UK EPR TM new nuclear power station design in 2010. Some other bodies will also be seeking views as part of their decision making process on matters that they are responsible for.