

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?

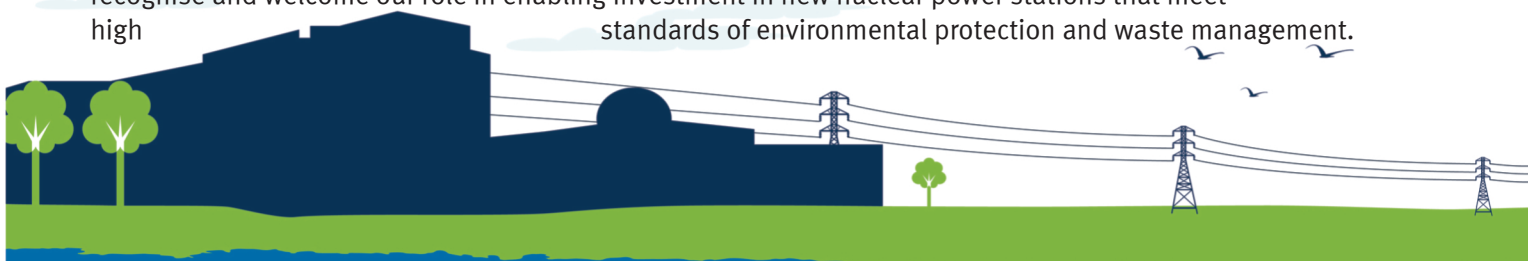
Tackling climate change and ensuring the security of future energy supplies are two key energy challenges we face in the UK. Old nuclear and coal-fired power stations are closing, reducing the security of the energy supply we need for everyday life, and climate change is a big concern for the future. 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. Its life has been extended and it is now due to stop generating in 2023. Hinkley Point was nominated by EDF Energy as a potential site for a new nuclear power station during the Department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) development of the NPS. DECC consulted widely on the draft NPS before deciding that the site should be included. EDF Energy's 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. From 1 April 2013 the new body, Natural Resources Wales, will be responsible for our current functions in 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. We work closely with the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) who regulate safety, security and transport. We recognise and welcome our role in enabling investment in new nuclear power stations that meet high standards of environmental protection and waste management.



How are you involved with proposed new nuclear power stations?

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 and disposals, cooling water discharges and the operation of stand-by generators. We decide if permits should be issued and, if so, what conditions should apply. Our work also includes;

- providing information about the environment around 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;
- 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;
- providing advice and information to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) about our regulatory matters;
- regulating sites for environmental matters during their construction, operation and decommissioning.

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

We, with ONR, have completed our generic design assessment of the UK EPR reactor design that is proposed by NNB GenCo for Hinkley Point. We concluded that the design would be acceptable if built in the UK and that people and the environment would be properly protected. Our assessment included its potential environmental impacts, including the radioactive wastes it would create and the discharges that it would make. We use this work to help inform our decisions on site specific environmental permit applications from potential operators.

What permits have you issued to NNB GenCo for the proposed Hinkley Point C?

We have issued three key operational environmental permits to NNB GenCo for Hinkley Point C. They will allow it to dispose of and discharge radioactive wastes, operate standby power supply systems using diesel generators and discharge cooling water and liquid effluents into the Bristol Channel. We received applications for these permits in summer 2011 and we consulted on our draft decisions on the applications in autumn 2012. The limits and conditions that we have set in the permits will ensure that people and the environment are properly protected.

We have also issued a permit to NNB GenCo relating to discharges of waste water generated from site preparation and construction activities. Our Environment Officers are working on site with NNB GenCo to ensure that the environment is protected during work to remove past asbestos contamination.

What happens next?

The Secretary of State is considering recommendations made by the Planning Inspectorate on whether a development consent order for the site should be issued. That decision is expected by 19 March 2013. NNB GenCo will now decide whether to proceed with this investment and, at the relevant time, seek permission from ONR to begin safety related construction.

How can I have my say?

Understanding and listening to the views of local people is very important. We consulted with the public on both the applications we received for operational permits and our draft decision documents. Other environmental permits may be required for construction. We will consult on these applications if we receive them. We also consulted on our Generic Design Assessment of the UK EPR nuclear power station design in 2010.

