

A Nuclear New Year...?

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It's been a busy start to the year with the UK government last month signalling the biggest expansion of nuclear power in 70 years and publishing no less than three key nuclear policy documents and consultations, including: a [Nuclear Roadmap to 2050](#); a proposed new [National Policy Statement](#); and proposing [Alternative routes to market for new nuclear projects](#).

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Taking each in turn:

Nuclear Roadmap to 2050

The Nuclear Roadmap foresees a much greater role for nuclear in the energy system – which is to be welcomed. As is the commitment to explore a further large-scale nuclear project beyond Sizewell C, in parallel with the deployment of SMRs, all of which are positive signals for the market. As the UK needs both large and small nuclear at scale and at pace for our energy security and net zero future. The Nuclear Roadmap also includes an intention to approve between 3 and 7 GW of nuclear capacity every five years from 2030 to 2044: meaning the UK now plans to maintain a regular drumbeat of projects for the next 20 years, which should help stimulate inward investment into the nuclear supply chain. The Nuclear Roadmap also requires UK regulators to “*maximise the use of overseas regulatory assessment*”, potentially making it easier for developers to enter the UK.

Enabling developers to engage with the Government about Regulated Asset Base funding models could also potentially reduce the overall costs of finance for new nuclear projects, and in turn promote inward investment. A more programmatic approach with the potential visibility of new projects, with decisions on 3-7GW in each five-year period, should be a welcome signal for nuclear supply chain investment, foreign direct investment, and UK plc alike. Furthermore, the commitment to maximise the UK's utilisation of regulatory assessments already undertaken overseas should empower innovative reactor designs and potentially help expedite delivery of permitting and consenting, as well as reducing unnecessary duplication in regulatory activity.

However, the Roadmap lacks granularity on the role to be played by the Government's new delivery body **Great British Nuclear (GBN)** and exactly what GBN will be tasked with doing. That said, it does envisage GBN helping to ‘*access sites and establish delivery capability to bring projects forward*’ and the support provided to the private sector will be ‘*able to provide developer capability and support in accessing sites.*’ Which is obviously not quite the same as saying that GBN will be the nuclear development company in all cases: but perhaps leaves the door open for private sector development companies to enter the market, by signalling that they shouldn't be crowded out of the market.



National policy statement

The purpose of this consultation is to begin the process of designating a new National Policy Statement (**NPS**), with the proposed new NPS (to be known as **EN-7**) being applicable to nuclear power stations expected to deploy after 2025 for GW scale nuclear power stations, Advanced Modular Reactors (**AMRs**) and Small Modular Reactors (**SMRs**). The key takeaways for the proposed EN-7 are as follows:

Designated sites: developers will be able to select sites using criteria set out in the new NPS: instead of a limited number of designated sites (under existing EN6), more siting opportunities should potentially be available.

Threshold: the government are proposing that all applications for nuclear generating projects in England (inc. those below 50 MW threshold) will be classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (**NSIP**) going forward – crucially this includes the thermal output, as well as electric output (therefore, capturing high temperature SMRs/AMRs thermal reactors).

Sunset clause: the removal of the deployment time limit (currently set at 2025 under existing EN6) for new projects, should help to bring more diverse range of potential sites and encourage a pipeline of new projects.

Wales: it is worth noting that this consultation relates to the exercise of powers in England and Wales; but the Wales Act 2017 also gives Welsh Ministers the responsibility to consent the construction of power stations with a generating capacity between 10MW and 350MW.

Overall, the proposed criteria-based approach to new nuclear deployment, with identification of specific sites for deployment no longer being proposed, as well as the removal of the deployment time limit for new projects, is likely to be welcomed by industry as this should help facilitate deployment across a more diverse range of industrial sites, thereby enabling AMRs to serve multiple uses cases (such as: process heat, hydrogen, synthetic fuels and district heating).

Alternative routes to market for new nuclear projects

Last, but not least, the government is consulting on a series of ways of making things easier for nuclear development, which is to be welcomed. Essentially here the government are proposing enabling policy reform, such as *'a new smarter regulation challenge for industry to help us identify further opportunities to streamline smarter regulation and drive efficiencies in the deployment of new projects.'*

The general acceptance that reform is needed, is indeed to be welcomed, with the government expressly acknowledging that *'some aspects of the regulatory pathways may not be best suited for Advanced Nuclear Technologies (ANTs), for instance, to the innovative manufacturing and build processes, or to the potential new uses of nuclear energy.'* However, delivery on commitments to streamlining permitting/consenting will inevitably depend upon political will, and prioritising the necessary resource allocation, for the ANT sector to play a timely role in the energy transition.

Next steps

Nuclear remains vitally important for energy security/ decarbonisation, and now with surging world-wide demand for nuclear energy, the fervent hope is that the government will follow the Nuclear Roadmap, at pace and with focus, to enable the most effective and efficient delivery of new nuclear. In much the same vein, news is also awaiting with GBN's announcement on the successful winners of the SMR competition and the promised launch of the UK Green Taxonomy consultation (including certifying nuclear as green technology), during the course of this year.