

Construction starts on 1,000-job battery plant for Envision AESC in North East

A £450m project to build a 1,000-job electric vehicle battery plant in Sunderland is now under way after a ceremony set construction. in motion.

Battery firm Envision AESC first launched plans to build the plant – its second in the North East – back in the summer of 2021, with its multimillion-pound investment forming part of a wider £1bn project with Nissan and Sunderland City Council which will led to the creation of thousands of new jobs. Now the company has marked 10 years of electric vehicle battery production in the UK with the start of construction on its latest gigafactory.

The plant will have a capacity of 12 GWh and employ over 1,000 people once operational, producing enough batteries to power more than 100,000 electric vehicles. The batteries set to roll out of the plant will be AESC's latest generation of battery, which will have 30% more energy density, improving range and efficiency.

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A special ceremony is marking the first phase of work, with AESC CEO Shoichi Matsumoto tightening the bolt on the building's 'first pillar' – a traditional Japanese custom on construction projects. The event is also celebrating a decade of EV battery production on Wearside, with the first electric vehicle battery built back in 2012 to support production of the first generation Nissan LEAF. The company has also doubled in size since production began and now employs more than 470 people in Sunderland.

The footprint of the new building will be the equivalent of 23 football pitches and will use 14000 km of mains cables, enough to stretch to the AESC HQ in Japan. Over 19,000 tonnes of steel will be used in the building's structure – twice the weight of the Eiffel Tower. When complete, the 360m long building will be longer than the nearby Northern Spire bridge across the River Wear.

Construction of the new building on IAMP – which spans land in South Tyneside and Sunderland – is being managed by construction company Wates Group and will pave the way for potential future investment that could eventually see the site generate 35GWh capacity and 4,500 new high value green jobs.

Envision AESC CEO Shoichi Matsumoto said: “The first pillar event marks the latest phase of Envision AESC’s investment in the UK and is a sign of our ongoing commitment to Sunderland. Our ambitious growth plans are built on a focus on quality, which is why we have over 800,000 electric vehicle batteries on the road globally with zero critical incidents.

“I want to pay tribute to the fantastic team in Sunderland who over the past decade have helped ensure each and every battery is built without compromise and helped make AESC a leading battery supplier.”

Leader of Sunderland City Council, coun Graeme Miller, said: “IAMP provides us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform our economy, creating sustainable new jobs that will support people from in and around the city for many years to come. And as work begins on Envision AESC’s landmark new Gigafactory, part of the wider £1bn EV Hub with Nissan–EV36Zero, we are accelerating our journey towards a greener, more sustainable future in the North East both in advanced manufacturing and in transport. This is a milestone moment for the city.”

Nissan Europe vice president, engineering, Andy Marsh said:

“We are delighted to be part of today’s ground breaking ceremony for Envision AESC’s new gigafactory. The first Sunderland battery plant helped launch the 100% electric Nissan LEAF and the second factory will be a fundamental part of our EV36Zero project, which brings together electric vehicle production, battery manufacturing and renewables as we drive towards carbon neutrality.”

Coun Tracey Dixon, Leader of South Tyneside Council, said: “This is an exciting milestone and further testament to what a superb asset IAMP is for the region. We are already leading the way in low carbon innovation and this facility will help ensure that South Tyneside residents are right at the forefront of the green revolution.

“We have an incredible talent pool here in the borough and we are continuing to nurture our workforce so that their skills and expertise mean they can capitalise on high quality jobs like those being created here, driving the green economy.”

Sir James Wates, chairman of Wates Group, said: “Envision AESC is the largest single project by value in our 125-year history. We are integrating years of expertise from across our business and supply partners to deliver this immensely complex scheme.

“This gigafactory represents the future of green, automotive manufacturing – not only in the North East, but nationally – and like all our projects, we’re committed to building it sustainably and for the long-term benefit of the region. It was an honour to celebrate this first phase with AESC and we look forward to our next milestone being completed.”

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