

Government urged to take action on mini nuclear plants as Britain fights to keep pace in race for clean power

Keir Starmer's government is being urged to make a decision on mini nuclear reactors by the end of the year, in what could be a real test of the Labour party's energy strategy.

It follows a [landmark deal this week](#) for a former nuclear site in Gloucestershire. The £6.5m sale of the science park in Berkeley has been hailed as a "momentous development" for Britain as it fights to keep pace in the global race for nuclear power.

The site was one of the first civil nuclear power stations in the world when built and home to a Magnox reactor between 1962 and 1989.

Rolls-Royce is eyeing the 40-acre park – now owned by zero carbon energy developer Chiltern Vital Group (CVG) – for its small modular reactors, or mini nukes.

The defence and aerospace giant is one of six companies hoping to win a competition to develop small nuclear plants in the UK. It has completed the second stage of its assessment of the technology, and is pressing for formal backing from government agency Great British Nuclear (GBN). The Berkeley park, which was previously owned by Gloucestershire and Stroud College, is based next to GBN's Oldbury nuclear site.

Chris Cholerton, chief executive of Rolls-Royce SMR, said: "We continue to urge Great British Nuclear to complete their SMR selection process this year, which will unlock the immediate deployment of SMR units and the long-term opportunity at sites

like Berkley.”

New owner CVG is planning to develop the Gloucestershire site into a supercluster for nuclear research and education over the next decade.

Phil Smith, managing director of chamber of commerce Business West, believes the site could be a “stake in the ground” for British nuclear power. “We hope the sale of Berkeley will be the first step in what could be a momentous development with several of the mini nuclear reactors (SMRs) on the site,” he said.

Labour has pledged to take decisive action on nuclear power and said small reactors would “play an important role” in helping Britain achieve energy security.

According to the latest World Nuclear Performance Report, nuclear reactors helped avoid 2.1 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions in 2023 from equivalent coal generation – more than the annual emissions of almost every country in the world, with the exception of China, India, and the US.

The UK has struggled when it comes to delivering on the nuclear front, however. Britain currently has nine operable reactors at five sites. Two major projects – Hinkley Point C in Somerset and Sizewell C in Suffolk – have been plagued with funding issues and delays.

Earlier this month, the [government refused to reveal](#) how much the planned Sizewell C nuclear power station is expected to cost, citing “ongoing and commercially sensitive negotiations”. The plant is being partly funded by French-owned energy giant EDF and is reported to cost in the region of £20bn, though it has been suggested that it could cost more than £30bn.

Professor Tom Scott of the University of Bristol says Britain has an opportunity to be “trailblazers” for advancing atomic

energy technologies by building small reactors that could replace fossil fuels and combat climate change.

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"News of this Berkeley Science Park development is incredibly exciting for the UK nuclear industry," he said. "It will act as a focal point for skills development, research and innovation that will serve the UK well for decades to come."

A spokesperson for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero said: "Small Modular Reactors will play an important role in helping the UK achieve energy security and clean power while securing thousands of good, skilled jobs. The window for submitting tenders for Great British Nuclear's small modular reactor technology has now closed and they are currently evaluating bids."