Uniper CEO on the need to ramp up hydrogen economy as big plans for the Humber emerge

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The chief executive of European energy giant Uniper – a key player in the Humber region's Net Zero ambition – has spoken of the need to accelerate the green transition.

Klaus-Dieter Maubach addressed both steps taken by the business, and the requirements from outside the gatehouses it controls, after posting stable first half results for 2021.

Uniper is looking to launch large scale hydrogen production at the gas-fired power station it operates at North Killingholme.

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It sits alongside the UK's biggest port, Immingham, the South Bank refining complex and new onshore substations where electricity generated by Orsted's world-leading offshore wind farms connect to the grid.

Plans to serve some of the hard-to-reach sectors for decarbonisation, with up to 700MW of blue hydrogen (from

natural gas) and up to 100MW green hydrogen (from renewable energy) have been put forward.

Initial studies show it as “both feasible and viable” for industry, power and transport.

Revealing earnings of £493 million for the first half of 2021, Mr Maubach said: “For the energy transition to succeed, the hydrogen economy needs to ramp up quickly. All low- and zero-carbon forms of hydrogen should play an equal role in this process. In addition, the renewables expansion must be accelerated.

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“Uniper aims to play a key role in propelling both of these developments. We’ll not only decommission fossil capacity, we’ll also add clean capacity.”

Uniper’s plans would see the Killingholme site producing by the mid 2020s.

The company is a leader in the field, and was one of the first to implement power-to-gas technology with its plant in Falkenhagen, Germany built in 2013 – channelling wind power.

Front end engineering design work is currently being prepared for a blue hydrogen facility at Killingholme, which the company said will start in 2022 – 30 years on from the original commissioning. It includes initiating early stage environmental surveys.

Uniper's Falkenhagen plant, where renewable energy was first used to produce hydrogen by the company.
(Image: Uniper)

Uniper said where possible, it plans to use existing infrastructure, ensuring hydrogen production costs are kept as low as possible, with the carbon dioxide transport and storage network under the Zero Carbon Humber plan described as "vital to the realisation of blue hydrogen at the Killingholme site".

It is one of many industry partners involved in the scheme, that stretches from Drax in North Yorkshire to Easington via North Lincolnshire and Saltend, linking up with the wider East Coast Cluster storage proposal with Teesside.

In his update, Mr Maubach said: "Since January, we've made good progress toward making our power generation business in Europe climate-neutral by 2035 and all our business operations climate-neutral by 2050."

It was successful in three auctions for ending coal-generation in Germany and has just brought forward plans to end fossil fuel use at Ratcliffe Power Station in Nottinghamshire.

June saw it revealed as a partner with ABP, Siemens Energy and Toyota Tsusho in turning Immingham into a hydrogen-powered port, with funding bids in.

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