

US nuclear consortium 'has a plan' for Wylfa with 'exploratory' talks taking place with UK Government

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A US nuclear sector consortium "has a plan" to build a large nuclear plant at Wylfa – with UK Government saying "exploratory" talks were taking place.

Westinghouse says the Anglesey site is the "perfect location" for a new nuclear site while partner Bechtel, a US engineering giant, has a proposal in place.

It would be based on a nuclear scheme in Georgia in the United States – although that project has been dogged by long delays and doubled in price from the original cost estimate.

Talking at the Welsh Affairs Committee a senior Government official said initial discussions were taking place with consortiums interested in building a nuclear plant at Wylfa.

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Horizon/Hitachi withdrew from developing the site after failing to reach a deal with UK Government on funding the project.

Barbara Rusinko, President of the Nuclear, Security and Environment Division at Bechtel, said: “It is regarded as the best site in the UK to build a large scale nuclear power station.

“Our team has a plan to facilitate the build on the most advanced nuclear technology today, the Westinghouse AP1000.

“It is capable of delivering clean power to the latest carbon budget commitments by 2035. It can prove transformational for Anglesey.”

She said it “strengthens the trans-Atlantic security partnership” and unlocks the “economic potential that exists on Anglesey and across Welsh communities”.

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Plans would be based on Plant Vogtle in Georgia where two additional reactor units are going into commercial operation in 2022.

Those units are to be the first major commercial nuclear reactors built from scratch in the United States in the last 30 years.

But the development has been hit by delays and rising costs.

Vogtle's two additional units were originally scheduled to be ready in 2016 and 2017 while the cost also has gone from \$14 billion to a potential \$27 billion final price.

Customers in Georgia will pay 11% extra on energy bills to fund the site.

Ms Rusinko said the failure of Wylfa Newydd demonstrated the need for "more Government intervention" in the UK to get these projects across the line.

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She said they had developed an approach to leverage backing and said they needed UK Government to “demonstrate commitment” in the spending review.

She said they needed investment in “front end design” that would be funded by the UK Government to “jump start” Wylfa.

David Durham, President of Energy Systems at Westinghouse, said it was the “safest reactor in the world” and designed specifically to deal with “station blackout” where all alternative electric connections are severed, as happened with Fukushima.

He said it was unlikely to ever see nuclear builds that weren’t part of a regulated market backed by state or national governments.

He said one of the reasons nuclear is expensive is that “everything needs to be precise” due to the safety issues.

He said even with Government support they “assumed” substantial risks and weren’t putting all costs and risks on UK Government and British tax and electricity bill payers.

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Lindsay Roche, Director of Government affairs at Westinghouse UK, said the “geography and geology” of the area make Wylfa a “perfect site”.

She said it would be a modular build approach with work spread across North Wales and further afield.

This would reduce the number of construction roles based on Anglesey but also ease the pressure on the island’s infrastructure over that build period.

She said UK Government had a chance to be “ahead of the game” on nuclear or rely on international markets and import power.

Ms Roche said there had been “good discussions” with UK Government and they were asking for “modest funding” (tens of millions) to take the first steps forward.

She added: “This is a project that can level up the economy, impact the regional economy of Anglesey, North Wales and North West England.”

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Declan Burke, director of nuclear projects and development at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, (BEIS), said the previous offer to Horizon/Hitachi had been a one third equity stake to underwrite financing and providing a strike price for 35 years of £75 (per MWh) – but they could not reach a commercial agreement.

He added that although a very significant offer had been made to Hitachi/Horizon there was a point ministers were “not willing to go beyond despite us all very much wanting that project to work”.



An artists impression of the planned nuclear power station at Wylfa on Anglesey

(Image: PA)

He said they remain in regular contact with them as site owners but understood they were “moving into different areas” making it unlikely they would revive their own interest in Wylfa Newydd.

He said the discussions with new developers were so far were “exploratory” so they can learn more about the proposals and how they could be funded.

Responding to a question from Aberconwy MP Robin Miller over potential liability for taxpayers, he said the cost to taxpayers and consumers was “front and centre of our minds” and were part of those exploratory talks with potential developers.

He added: “We absolutely think nuclear would be a very critical part of Net Zero but it does need to work for the

taxpayer perspective as well.”

He said they were looking at the Regulated Asset Base model where revenue is made by the investors while construction is taking place due the huge cost and long period of capital investment.

This would come from consumers and/or taxpayers ahead of the plant being completed.

He said calibrating the funding mechanism gives confidence to investors and protects the consumer as well.

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