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Renewable energy: E.ON looks at £300m investment to build Britain's largest biomass plant

Mark Milner, industrial editor
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E.ON, the energy company whose plans for Britain's first new coal-fired power station for more than two decades have sparked fierce protests, said yesterday it was considering a £300m investment in building one of the country's biggest biomass power plants.

The company said it wanted to construct the 150 megawatt plant at the port of Bristol as part of its multimillion-pound investment programme in a range of generating technologies.

Paul Golby, the chief executive of E.ON UK, said the Royal Portbury Dock renewable energy plant would make a significant contribution towards helping the government meet its renewable energy targets.

"Schemes such as this, together with cleaner coal, gas and new nuclear, will help us to keep the UK's lights on, while reducing carbon emissions and ensuring energy is as affordable as possible for our customers," he said.

E.ON's investment programme in Britain includes one of the world's largest gas-fired power stations, at the Isle of Grain in Kent, as well as the gas-fired plant at Drakelow in Derbyshire; an offshore wind farm in the Solway Firth and plans for the Humber Gateway wind farm. It is also a partner in the London Array wind farm and has invested in marine energy projects in Cornwall and Pembrokeshire.

The company is also looking at the possibility of building at least two nuclear power stations.

But its proposal to replace its existing coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth in Kent with a £1.5bn coal plant has attracted fierce controversy.

Earlier this month environmental protesters held its week-long Climate Camp outside the existing Kingsnorth power station as part of the campaign of opposition against the new plant.

Yesterday Greenpeace's Jim Footner said that if E.ON wanted to be seen as one of the country's leading green generators it should drop its plans for the Kingsnorth power station, which dwarfed the planned biomass plant.

"E.ON does have investment in renewables and they are pushing forward this scheme. We want them to go down this road and use that expertise and technology and stop cancelling it out by pushing forward a coal-fired power station."

According to E.ON's statement outlining the proposals for the planned biomass plant, which has been issued to North Somerset council and the Department for Business and Enterprise, the plant would be able to generate enough electricity to supply 250,000 homes and would cut carbon dioxide emissions by 500,000 tonnes a year - the equivalent of taking 175,000 average-sized cars off the road.

The plant would burn some 1.2m tonnes of fuel, most of which will be wood chip, brought in by ship and supplemented by regionally sourced recycled wood.

As well as generating electricity, the biomass plant would be capable of supplying heat to neighbouring industrial establishments.

If the proposal does win approval, E.ON is hoping to start work in 2010, with the first power produced in 2013 and the plant coming into full operation in 2014.

The Portbury dock plant will be the company's third biomass development in Britain.

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