# £1.3bn Essex data centre approved as UK AI build-out accelerates



Plans for a £1.3 billion AI data centre in Wickford, Essex, have received outline planning approval, marking a major step in the UK’s growing digital infrastructure drive. The seven-year development, led by Caineal, will rise alongside the A127 and Old Nevendon Road, positioning Basildon as a key player in the UK’s AI revolution.

The site will feature 27,000 square metres of data halls and office space across multiple levels, including two IT floors and three office levels above. A 4,500 square metre substation, supported by underground cabling, will power the high-capacity facility. Around £500 million is allocated to construction and another £500 million to state-of-the-art computer hardware.

The project is expected to support 600 full-time construction jobs annually and create around 120 permanent skilled roles once operational.

In response to environmental concerns raised during planning, Caineal has pledged to create a 34.5-acre nature reserve expanding the Nevendon Wetlands. A closed-loop water cooling system will also cut water usage—reflecting the industry’s push toward more sustainable infrastructure.

Councillor Jessica Power, cabinet member for jobs and skills, said the development would put Basildon “at the heart of the UK’s AI revolution.” The scheme includes contributions to education, job training and sustainable transport, supporting local growth and skills development.

The Wickford project joins a wave of large-scale UK data centre investments. In the Humber region, a £3 billion AI campus has secured approval for 386MW of IT power. Near London, Foxboro Business Park is set for expansion, while in Scotland, the £3.9 billion Ravenscraig project will harness local renewables for data operations. Lincolnshire is preparing for a £7.5 billion AI campus capable of generating nearly 50MW on-site.

Amazon Web Services has also committed £8 billion over five years to UK AI and cloud infrastructure. These initiatives align with government-backed AI Growth Zones, designed to streamline approvals and boost energy access.

Led by Arc MC Architects and CPA Consulting Engineers, the Essex scheme is ready to move forward once final planning conditions are met. Its strategic location, environmental commitments and local investment promise to make it a cornerstone of the UK’s AI infrastructure ambitions.

As the UK balances rapid digital expansion with environmental and social responsibility, projects like Wickford’s show how sustainable, community-focused innovation can take root at scale.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2025/09/29/1-3bn-essex-ai-data-centre-gains-outline-planning/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itpro.com/infrastructure/data-centres/plans-for-basildon-data-centre-approved> - Basildon Council has approved the construction of a £1.3 billion data centre in Wickford, Essex, to be developed by Caineal. The 1.8-hectare facility is expected to generate over 600 construction jobs and 120 permanent skilled roles, along with substantial indirect employment through associated services. Positioned alongside the A127 and Old Nevendon Road, the centre is intended to support the UK's growing AI infrastructure, contributing significantly to Basildon’s economic development and positioning it as a hub for tech enterprises. The project includes a substation, energy centre, and public open spaces. Initial plans were revised amid concerns over green belt encroachment, resulting in commitments to biodiversity improvements and a new nature reserve. Financial contributions for local education, job training, and sustainable transport have also been pledged by Caineal. Basildon's approval aligns with broader regional investments in data infrastructure, including ongoing projects by Fujitsu, Google, and Nscale. The UK government has endorsed AI Growth Zones to expedite such developments, emphasizing faster approvals and energy access to boost the nation's status as an AI leader.
3. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2024/08/05/giant-3bn-humber-data-centre-campus-approved/> - Developer Humber Tech Park has received approval for a £3 billion AI data centre campus in the Humber region. The ambitious plan includes three large buildings, offices, and a 300,000 sq ft horticultural glasshouse with a possible district heating system. A new electricity substation will be built on the site to handle the 386MW of IT system power requirements. The greenfield site is bounded by the A160 dual carriageway to the north and west, between the Habrough Road Roundabout and the Bocklesby Interchange. If the whole project is built out over a three to four-year period, it would support at least 2,500 to 3,500 jobs a year on and off-site.
4. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2025/01/08/castleforge-plans-expansion-after-100m-data-centre-deal/> - Castleforge and Galaxy Data Centers plan to expand the Foxboro Business Park data centre near London, increasing capacity by around 50%. The existing centre spans 11,800 square metres across three buildings with 26MVA of power, attracting 26 existing tenants. Upgrades to the existing data centre will commence imminently to provide greater power availability and power densities. Construction works for the new facility are planned to begin later this year, with initial phases expected to be ready for occupation in 2026. The expansion aims to meet the surging demand for data, significantly outstripping current levels of power supply, and address the challenges of constructing new data centres around major metropolitan areas.
5. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2025/06/30/3-9bn-data-centre-plan-for-ravenscraig-steelworks/> - Renewables developer Apatura is spearheading a £3.9 billion data centre project on 160 acres of post-industrial land east of Glasgow, powered by Scotland’s growing surplus of wind and solar energy. The proposed data centre, one of five AI-ready sites Apatura is developing across the central belt, will be built at the SevenFourEight industrial zone, adjacent to the Wishaw Deviation freight railway and with direct links to the M74 and M8. Early estimates suggest the project will deliver a one-off £1.2 billion GVA boost during construction, supporting over 16,000 job years, with 2,399 long-term jobs once operational.
6. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2025/05/30/uks-biggest-data-centre-plan-breaks-cover-in-lincolnshire/> - Elsham Tech Park has unveiled plans for a £7.5 billion AI data centre campus covering 176 hectares at the former RAF Elsham Wolds airfield. The project includes a major new energy centre generating up to 49.9MW on-site, alongside a battery storage compound, substations, district heating plant, and flexible commercial space. The outline planning application submitted to North Lincolnshire Council outlines one of the most ambitious digital infrastructure projects ever, targeting 1,000MW of IT load to serve the accelerating needs of artificial intelligence and cloud computing. The plans are backed by a 10-year construction window that could support between 2,600 to 3,600 full-time equivalent construction jobs annually both on and off-site.
7. <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2024/09/11/amazon-to-invest-8bn-in-hyperscale-datacentres/> - Amazon Web Services (AWS) has announced plans to invest £8 billion in digital and AI infrastructure over the next five years to meet the growing needs of customers and support the transformation of the UK's digital economy. The investment is expected to support around 14,000 jobs per year at local businesses, including those across the supply chain in construction, facility maintenance, engineering, and telecommunications, as well as other jobs within the broader local economy. The locations of the new data centres have not been disclosed but will be spread around the country, supplementing existing capacity in the London area.