

From Industrial Powerhouse to Power Shortage: Britain's Self-Inflicted Energy Crisis

Britain's industrial electricity prices were once among Europe's most competitive. In 2008, our energy costs for heavy industry were below Germany's and only slightly above the EU average.

Today, as of early 2026 data, large UK industrial users still pay around 24–26p per kWh – the highest among G7 nations and roughly two-thirds above the International Energy Agency median. We remain the most expensive place in the developed world to run a factory.

This is no temporary blip. It is the direct result of two decades of policy that deliberately reduced the number of “core electrons” – the steady, dispatchable megawatts of electricity we can call on 24/7 from power stations that actually turn on when the wind drops or demand spikes. Fewer reliable electrons mean tighter supply, higher wholesale prices, squeezed business budgets, lost manufacturing jobs and an economy increasingly at the mercy of imports.

What “increasing all forms of electrons” actually means

Electricity is literally electrons flowing through wires. “Core electrons” are the firm, controllable supply from coal (with modern clean tech), gas, oil-fired peaking and nuclear reactors – sources that produce power on demand. By massively increasing output from every one of these sources we flood the grid with reliable supply. Wholesale prices fall. System costs drop. Energy-intensive industries become competitive again. It is the opposite of the damage we have seen: more electrons = lower costs = more jobs = genuine prosperity.

The solution is unarguable: boost production from coal (revitalised with modern technology), gas, oil-fired where needed, and above all nuclear – while dramatically increasing domestic production and recycling to achieve much greater strategic self-reliance in steel, aluminium, agriculture, copper, lithium and rare-earth elements (NDPR). Rely on ourselves first.

North Sea Oil and Gas: Our Own Untapped Reservoir of Firm Electrons

The North Sea remains Britain's greatest strategic asset. Drilling on Rosebank – one of the largest undeveloped discoveries – began in March 2026, with first oil and associated gas targeted for late 2026 or early 2027. Proven and probable reserves stand at 2.9 billion barrels of oil equivalent, with further contingent and prospective resources that could double official gas projections.

North Sea gas still powers around 27–28% of Britain's electricity through CCGTs. Maximising recovery, accelerating tie-backs and stable tax/infrastructure policy will keep this firm backbone strong for decades.

Revitalising Coal: Using Brownfield Sites and Fast-Tracked Licences for Dispatchable Power

The last traditional coal-fired station closed in 2024, but that does not mean we abandon the technology entirely. We can revitalise Britain's coal heritage through practical, modern routes that deliver firm electrons without turning the clock back.

Strategic methods that cannot be refuted:

- Repurpose closed coal sites immediately. Former power-station brownfield land (Ratcliffe-on-Soar, West Burton, etc.) already has grid connections, cooling systems, transport links and skilled local workforces. These sites are ideal for new high-efficiency supercritical or ultra-supercritical plants fitted with full carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS).
- Fast-track licensing via energy-security legislation. Emergency planning reforms (already being rolled out for nuclear and renewables) can be extended to “dispatchable firm power” projects. Set a 12-month approval process for CCUS-enabled plants on existing coal footprints. France, Japan and parts of Asia continue to use advanced coal cleanly; Britain's engineering expertise can match or exceed them.
- Biomass co-firing with capture or hybrid gas-coal transition. Convert existing infrastructure for sustainable biomass with BECCS (bioenergy with carbon capture) to deliver negative-emission firm power during the build-out of nuclear. This uses the same boilers, turbines and staff – just cleaner fuel and capture tech.
- Government-backed revenue support. Offer Contracts for Difference or capacity-market top-ups specifically for these transitional dispatchable plants, guaranteeing investors while keeping bills down. These steps turn yesterday's coal sites into tomorrow's reliable electron factories. They are not ideological – they are pragmatic use of what we already own.

Strategic Self-Reliance in Critical Materials and Food

We cannot keep importing 80–90% of our lithium, rare earths (NDPR), copper and processed metals from China while our own geology, recycling infrastructure and skilled workforce sit idle. Cheap, abundant core electrons are the game-changer: they make energy-intensive mining, smelting, processing and glasshouse farming economic again.

Strategic methods that cannot be refuted:

- Fast-track domestic extraction. Extend the government's Critical Minerals Strategy with emergency licensing for lithium and geothermal projects in Cornwall (Trelavour and Copper House sites already have planning permission granted in 2026). Target 10,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate per year by 2029–2030 and scale to the official 50,000-tonne goal by 2035 using dedicated low-cost power contracts from new nuclear and gas. Add copper exploration in Anglesey and Wales – sites already identified and ready for acceleration.

- Revive steel and aluminium production. Guarantee 15-year fixed-price power deals (target 8–10p/kWh) for Port Talbot’s electric arc furnace conversion and Scunthorpe steelworks, plus the Lochaber aluminium smelter in Scotland. Cheap electrons turn British recycled scrap into competitive primary and secondary steel and aluminium, protecting thousands of jobs and defence supply chains.

- Build world-class recycling hubs. Expand facilities like HyProMag in Birmingham (already open 2026 for rare-earth magnets) and Ionic Technologies, plus new battery-recycling plants in the North East. Aim for 30%+ recycling of lithium, NDPR and copper by 2035 – using far less energy than virgin mining and creating high-skill green jobs.

- Secure food production. Offer subsidised long-term power contracts to glasshouse and vertical-farming operators across the UK. Reliable electrons from nuclear, gas and revitalised coal sites enable year-round, energy-intensive protected cropping, pushing domestic food self-sufficiency from today’s ~65% toward 75–80% and reducing reliance on volatile imports.

These steps use British geology, existing sites and engineering expertise – no new inventions required, just political will and the flood of cheap electrons we will create.

The Next 5 Years: Emergency Rebuild (2026–2031)

- Planning reform: cut approval times to 12–18 months for all firm generation and critical minerals projects.
- Gas and North Sea first: accelerate Rosebank and tie-backs; bring mothballed gas plants back.
- Nuclear: extend remaining AGRs; start SMR construction at Wylfa in 2026 with first power targeted for early 2030s.
- Coal revitalisation: fast-track licences and begin CCUS conversion on at least two former sites.
- Materials kick-start: grant emergency licences and cheap-power contracts for Cornish Lithium (first production 2029), Port Talbot EAF, HyProMag expansion and glasshouse operators.

Result: wholesale prices begin falling as reliable electrons return and domestic materials production ramps up.

The Next 10–14 Years: Building the Backbone (2031–2040)

- Accelerate the nuclear fleet: multiple SMR clusters plus large reactors, pushing towards 20%+ of electricity supply from nuclear by 2040 through faster modular construction and private investment.
- North Sea maximisation and coal-with-CCUS: keep gas strong; deliver first revitalised coal/CCUS plants for winter peaks and industry.
- Critical materials scale-up: hit and then exceed the official 10% domestic + 20%

recycling targets for lithium, copper and NDPR; revive full-scale British steel and aluminium output with long-term competitive power contracts.

Energy-intensive industries receive guaranteed low-cost electricity. British-made steel, aluminium and battery components become reality again.

By 2040: Energy and Material Sovereignty

Nuclear share pushed aggressively to 25–30% of supply through a full SMR fleet and follow-on advanced reactors. Diverse firm power (gas, revitalised coal-with-full CCUS, nuclear) forms the reliable core. Renewables complement but never dominate.

Dramatically boost domestic production and recycling of steel, aluminium and critical minerals to achieve much greater strategic self-reliance (well beyond the 2035 10%/20% baseline), protecting supply chains for defence, EVs and manufacturing. Agriculture moves towards 75–80% self-sufficiency with cheap, secure power.

America's shale revolution and France's nuclear-heavy grid prove the model. Britain has the geology, the sites (including former coal plants), the North Sea resource and the engineering expertise.

Continuing with the world's highest industrial electricity prices is economic self-harm. The alternative is clear: increase every form of electrons – starting now with our own North Sea gas, new nuclear, revitalised coal sites and all the firm power we can build. Dramatically strengthen domestic materials and food security. Put British prosperity first.

The factories will hum again. The bills will fall. And future generations will inherit an energy-abundant Britain.