# Local authorities overwhelmingly approve data centre projects to boost UK's digital infrastructure



In a significant step towards augmenting the UK's digital infrastructure, recent research has revealed that local authorities across the country’s largest cities are overwhelmingly approving data centre projects. Conducted by Onnec, the study indicates that out of 88 planning applications over the last five years, only three were rejected, with five withdrawn and a major project in East Havering remaining undecided. The findings reflect a strong alignment between government policy and local authority actions, aimed at bolstering both the economy and the burgeoning artificial intelligence (AI) sector.

The planning rejections stemmed from proposals in Sheffield, where issues of design quality and environmental considerations were cited. The local authorities indicated the rejected projects were deemed "visually unattractive" and incompatible with the Green Belt, which also affected the character of the wider landscape. The UK's designation of data centres as critical national infrastructure in September 2024 marks a pivotal move towards recognising their importance for economic growth and AI development, with an impressive £6.3 billion in global investment earmarked for UK data centres.

Local government and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) are actively working towards ensuring data centre needs are met within broader governmental and economic strategies. Matt Salter, Data Centre Director at Onnec, noted that "not every project will be at the scale of East Havering," yet the enthusiastic approval from numerous local authorities signals a proactive approach to supporting the growing sector, vital for driving AI advancements.

As AI technologies evolve, data centres are becoming essential for supplying required computing power and storage solutions. However, industry experts emphasize the necessity for strategic planning beyond London, which currently holds the position of the largest data centre market in Europe. Luisa Cardani, Head of Data Centres at TechUK, highlighted the potential economic benefits, noting that data centres contribute £4.7 billion to the UK's gross value added (GVA) and offer approximately 40,000 jobs, with projections anticipating this impact to double in the next five years.

A key component for the future designed data centres will involve energy efficiency and sustainable practices. Experts advocate for adopting advanced cooling technologies and integrating renewable energy solutions. With projections from the International Energy Agency suggesting that energy consumption in data centres could double by 2026, strategies to modernise energy grids and improve consumption efficiency are deemed essential for aligning with national goals regarding carbon neutrality.

Strategic planning and location selection are pivotal to the successful development of data centres. Factors such as proximity to renewable energy sources and the potential for utilising existing infrastructure from brownfield sites are recommended for reducing environmental impact and enhancing operational efficiency. Alex Sharp, Chief Projects Officer at Nscale, stated that developers need to remain focused on not just technological innovations but also on community engagement to gain broader acceptance for these facilities.

Efforts to encourage dialogue and cooperation between developers and local communities are emphasized as critical components in overcoming local resistance to data centre projects. Fostering a positive perception that data centres can serve as community assets will be important in ensuring long-term support for their development.

The future of the UK’s digital economy hinges on effective partnerships between local authorities, developers, and the community. As the demand for renovated infrastructure grows in light of increased AI workloads, prioritising sustainable design, energy efficiency, and collaboration will be paramount in unlocking the full potential of the data centre industry in supporting economic growth and innovation across the entire country.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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