



An
Bord
Pleanála

Board Direction
BD-003563-19
ABP-303108-18

The submissions on this file and the Inspector's report were considered at a Board meeting held on 12/07/2019.

The Board decided to refuse permission, generally in accordance with the Inspector's recommendation, for the reasons and considerations set out below.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Board completed an Environmental Impact Assessment and agreed with the Inspector in his assessment of the likely significant effects of the proposed development, which include climate impacts by means of continued burning of peat, transportation impacts, impacts on water from continued harvesting of peat to fuel the plant during the transition phase and nuisance to residents in the vicinity of the power plant due to increased traffic through the village and the extended delivery times for the biomass fuel. Furthermore, given the lack of information regarding the source of the biomass to be used as a fuel, the Board concluded that it cannot reasonably be determined that the main direct and indirect effects of the proposed development on the environment would be mitigated.

Stage 1 - Appropriate Assessment Screening

In completing the screening for Appropriate Assessment, the Board considered the identification of the European sites in the area which could potentially be affected, and the identification and assessment of the potential likely significant effects of the proposed development, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on these European sites in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives. The Board was not satisfied that the proposed continued harvesting of peat associated with the supply of fuel to the power plant, either individually or in combination with

other plans or projects, would not have potential for significant effects upon the European sites of the River Shannon Callows SAC (000216), the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096), Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776), Suck River Callows SPA (004097), Fin Lough SAC (000576), River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299) and River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162), in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives and that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was required.

Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment

The Board adopted the report of the Inspector and agreed with his conclusions in relation to the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment that, with the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, the proposed development of the power station and the ash disposal facility would not, either alone or in combination with other projects and plans, adversely impact the integrity of any European site. However, the Board concluded that the indirect effects on European sites, arising from the continued sourcing of peat fuel from the supply bogs, cannot be conclusively determined on the basis of the information provided with the application.

Reasons and Considerations on Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

1. It is considered that the provision of a regionally significant power generating facility, dependent primarily upon the burning of a fuel imported into the facility, needs to be associated and aligned with strategic energy management, planning and renewable energy policies and plans in order to achieve balanced, orderly and sustainable development. Furthermore, it is considered that the development of such energy infrastructure, pursuing optimal sustainable utilisation of renewable energy emanating from the power production process, is required in order that such development positively contributes to the environment and that the siting of such development is appropriately located, with accessibility to the supply network of the intended fuel sources. Finally, it is considered that the cessation of the use of peat as a fuel is a key component within national climate and energy policy in helping to reduce the generation of excessive greenhouse emissions from the established facility to assist in meeting the State's domestic, EU and international climate change obligations in the energy sector.

Having regard to:

- The national requirements under the European Union Renewables Directive 2009/28/EC relating to the share of energy from renewable sources and to the increased obligations under the (recast) Renewable Energy Directive EU 2018/2001;
- National policy provisions supporting the cessation of the burning of peat as a fuel source for electricity generation;
- The dependence of the proposed development on the continuance of peat burning and its ongoing contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, notwithstanding any transition period proposed;
- The requirement for the alternative fuel to be used to produce renewable energy to be 'sustainable';
- The inadequacy of the indigenous biomass supply in the State to serve the proposed development, and the proposed high dependence on imported biomass which is contrary to European Union and national policy;
- The siting of the existing power plant in the Midlands, away from coastal ports, and its significant dependence on the importation of biomass from global markets, which will result in unsustainably high volumes of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements across the State to serve the development; and
- The likely significant impact for the amenity of the village of Shannonbridge and for its residents by way of traffic impact, nuisance and disturbance due to the servicing of the power station by biomass transported by the road network,

it is considered that the proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. Having regard to:

- the nature and scale of the proposed development,
- the proposed phased replacement of the fuel type from railway-delivered peat to road-delivered biomass,
- the quantity of biomass proposed to be used at the facility,
- the transportation movements generated in the sourcing of the biomass and in the distribution of end product, both nationally and globally,
- the deficiencies in the regional road network to serve the ongoing delivery by HGVs of biomass to the plant, due to the extent of narrow road widths, bridge width restrictions, poor horizontal alignment, and structural condition, and
- the inadequacy of the access provisions to the east of the site and the consequent reliance on the main entrance, resulting in significant volumes of HGV traffic passing through the village centre of Shannonbridge,

it is considered that the proposed fuelling of the power plant by biomass would give rise to unsustainable transportation movements on a substandard regional road network and would endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard and obstruction of road users. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Board Member

Date: 17/07/2019

Dave Walsh