



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting 300398-17 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

<b>Case Reference /Description</b>	Proposed Timahoe Solar Array, County Kildare.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/ 3<sup>rd</sup>Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	07/03/18	<b>Start Time</b>	2.30 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	Seomra Chathal Brugha	<b>End Time</b>	3.40 p.m.
<b>Chairperson</b>	Philip Green	<b>Executive Officer</b>	Rob Forde
<b>Present</b>			
<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>			
<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Email Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	
Philip Green, Assistant Director of Planning			
Máiréad Kenny, Senior Planning Inspector			
Diarmuid Collins, Senior Administrative Officer			
Rob Forde, EO			
Fergal Kilmurray, EO			

<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>		
Sean Creedon	Bord Na Móna Powergen Ltd	
Michael McCormack	Bord Na Móna Powergen Ltd	
Sarah Stapleton	Electricity Supply Board	
Michael Watson	McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan	
Jimmy Green	McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan	

The meeting commenced at 2.30 pm.

**Introduction:** The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant dated the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 2017 formally requesting pre-application consultations with the Board.

The Board advised the prospective applicant that the meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board; invited the prospective applicant to outline the nature of the proposed development and to highlight any matters it wished to receive advice on from the Board. The Board mentioned general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process as follows:

- The Board will keep a record of this meeting and any other meetings that are held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process.
- The Board will serve formal notice at the conclusion of the process as to whether or not the proposed development is SID. It may form a preliminary view at an early stage in the process as to whether the proposed development would be likely to constitute strategic infrastructure.

- A further meeting or meetings may be held in respect of the proposed development.
- Further information may be requested by the Board and public consultations may also be directed by the Board.
- The Board may hold consultations in respect of the proposed development with other bodies.
- The holding of consultations does not prejudice the Board in any way and cannot be relied upon in the formal planning process or any legal proceedings.

Reference was made to the strategic Infrastructure provisions as inserted by Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 into section 37A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

**Presentation by the prospective applicant:**

The prospective applicant introduced the project and set out an overview of same. It was stated that they would appreciate feedback from An Bord Pleanála regarding the proposed project. It was outlined that Bord na Móna was committed to a de-carbonisation process in respect of its developments and placed emphasis on renewable resources such as wind and solar. There is a high-level strategy to double the renewable output by 2030. The Board asked whether it was a joint application/venture and it was confirmed that it was.

The applicant went through the site selection process and drew attention to factors that were considered important such as proximity to N4 and to the power line. It was stated that the development was in line with policies set out in the Kildare County Development Plan. The site had been a former peat extraction site, extraction had ceased in the late 90's, and now had a certain amount of regeneration. Ecological

information had been gathered about the site including the location of NHA's and SAC's within 15kms of the site. There were approximately 120 houses located within 1 km of the site with the nearest dwelling being 450 metres from the site . The entire site comprised 807 hectares with the solar development comprising 140 hectares of the total. There was also an element of the site that would function as a peat repository. The proposed development would also include a battery storage facility .

There is presently an amenity aspect to the site in that the disused railway was being used as a walkway by locals and it would be proposed to upgrade this walkway as part of the development.

As part of the fieldwork bore holes and trial pits had been dug and nothing unusual had been discovered as regards depth of soil and peat conditions. Hydrological, archaeological and cultural assessments had also been carried out. Bird surveys have been carried out and the only protected species on site appeared to be the lapwing. Badger setts had been detected on site and also the presence of red squirrels. Bat surveys had been carried out. Peatland habitats had been identified and mapped. Parts of the cut-out former bog had regenerated with trees such as alder and hazel now growing there. In total 60 hectares of this regenerated area will be lost due to the proposed development. The aim would be to have no net loss of trees with replanting being carried out.

Regarding hydrological aspects of the site, drainage design had been investigated with detailed mapping of the site along with water-level and rainfall monitoring being carried out. The wettest areas of the site had been excluded from development. It was quite a contained catchment area. A baseline survey had been carried out as regards noise. Regarding landscape, it was stated that it was unusually well-screened with woodlands and it was hard to find open views.

Over 10 hectares of natural woodland would be removed and the development includes a private road exceeding 2000 metres in length (both of these would have EIAR implications). On behalf of the Board it was stated that the fact that an EIAR is required did not necessarily mean that the development is strategic infrastructure.

. The prospective applicant had consulted homeowners in relation to site investigations undertaken. As part of this consultation process 2 no. public consultation days were held. The response to this type of development was generally positive. A liaison officer visited local houses with maps and an information booklet. The Irish Peatland Council had been consulted.

It was stated that Eirgrid had made a grid connection offer to the 110Kv overhead line. The Board sought clarification as to who will be retaining the sub-station and it was confirmed that ESB networks will do so. The overall capacity of the sub-station will be 70 megawatts. The capacity of the battery storage facility will be 20 megawatts. . The Board also sought clarification as to whether the overhead line would function as a transmission line and it was confirmed that this was so and it would be part of the transmission network. It was noted that this in itself could have strategic infrastructure implications.

As regards pre-planning issues it was stated that the applicant had engaged with Kildare County Council on a number of issues. It appeared that the local authority were awaiting to see what the response of the Board would be to the project. The applicant affirmed that it would be their preference to present a single application i.e. rather than end up with one part of the development being strategic development and the other part being a planning application to the planning authority. The applicant stated that they would like to get this clarified from the Board as soon as possible. As such although there are thresholds applying to wind-farm developments (which result into whether they are classified as strategic infrastructure) the same does not apply to solar-farm developments. The Board also stated that although the

splitting of projects is not ideal it would be for the Board of An Bord Pleanála to give its opinion on this. The electricity transmission element of the proposed development might constitute SI but the solar farm element would not appear to be a class of development set out in the Seventh Schedule.

**Queries/matters raised by the Board:** There was some discussion as to whether the prospective applicants had sought the position of Eirgrid regarding whether electricity transmission as designated in SI legislation may arise. The Board indicated that it would consult with Eirgrid in this respect and to ascertain their views. Discussion also took place regarding the need to present separate EIAR's should the need arise as there would not be an automatic presumption that an electricity transmission case would be a class of development that itself required EIA. Some matters were discussed regarding timelines and the reporting Inspector also stated that a site visit would be made. Copies of various photomontages and reports were handed in.

The Senior Inspector would prepare a brief report for the Board to seek its view regarding whether or not the project constituted strategic development and the Board may give a preliminary view on this matter.

**Conclusion:** With respect to the pre-application consultation process generally, the Board clarified to the prospective applicant that it may submit comments on the record of the instant meeting if it wishes to do so. The Board would consult with Eirgrid to seek information on the relationship of the proposed electricity transmission elements of the proposed development with the transmission network.

The meeting concluded at 3.40 p.m.

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**Philip Green**  
**Assistant Director of Planning**