



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting
ABP-306229-19

Case Reference / Description	ABP-306229-19 / 21 wind turbines with an estimated output capacity of circa 110 megawatts together with grid connection and all associated infrastructure		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
Meeting	1 st meeting		
Date	28/05/2020	Time	11:00 to 12:30

Attendees		
Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Rachel Kenny, Director of Planning (Chair)		
Donal Donnelly, Senior Planning Inspector		
Jennifer Sherry, Executive Officer	j.sherry@pleanala.ie	018737266
Representing Coillte		
John Staunton, TOBIN Project Manager		
Allen Kelly, TOBIN Planner		
Robert Hunt, TOBIN		
Kieran O'Malley, Coillte Project Manager		
Sinead O'Malley, Coillte Planning Manager		
Eamonn O'Domhnaill, ART Generation		

Introduction

Following introductions, the representatives of the Board referred to the request received from the prospective applicant to enter into pre-application consultations.

The Board advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board to determine whether the proposed development was SID or not and if so, what the key considerations may be. It also 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, if held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process. The record of the meeting will not be amended by the Board once finalised, but the prospective applicant may submit comments on the record in writing which will form part of the case file.
- 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 likely 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.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

The proposed development is for the construction of a windfarm comprising of proposed 21 no. wind turbines with an estimated output capacity of circa 110 megawatts together with grid connection and all associated infrastructure. The prospective applicant gave an overview of the project under the following headings of:

- **Background to the site** – the site area is c. 1400 hectares and is mostly commercial forestry owned by Coillte. The remainder of the site is owned by Art Generation LTD and private properties. Coillte and Art Generation LTD were both looking for suitable sites for renewable wind energy projects and have a formal agreement for the proposed development site. The prospective applicant is involved in discussions with over 25 private landowners.
- **Existing Environment** – is rural with dispersed settlement type with no properties within 750m of any of the proposed 21 no. wind turbines. The closest town is Ballyhale at 2.2km from the site boundary with only partial visibility from the proposed development site. The M9 Dublin to Waterford Motorway runs north-south to the west of the development site and is not considered a sensitivity receptor. Two other operational wind farms at Ballymartin and Rahora are located south to south-east of the proposed site.
- **Project Design** – The project has developed from 33 no. turbines in May, 2019 and 25 no. turbines in October, 2019 with various tip height and rotor diameter. Currently the proposed development will comprise of 21 no. turbines with a maximum tip height of up to 185m and 155m rotor diameter, generating approximately 115MW output capacity with 110kV loop-in grid connection.
- **Policy Context and Planning Policy** – Project 2040: National Planning Framework, Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and Kilkenny County Development Plan 2014-2020 all support renewable energy. The prospective applicant said they have engaged with Kilkenny County Council who are in the process of completing a revised wind energy development strategy in the Draft Kilkenny County Development Plan

2021-2027 and it is intended that there would be a draft proposed plan at the end of Q3 2020.

- **Key Environmental Considerations** – the prospective applicant stated several permutations of the site layout were considered including appropriate turbine layout and spacing. The noise impact of wind turbines on sensitive receptors are to be designed to existing guidelines. The proposed connection to the National Grid will need to cross the Arrigle River which forms part of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (site code: 02162) and a small local road. In response to the Board's question in relation to this element, the prospective applicant stated there will be no in stream development works and it is proposed to use directional drilling under the river bed, road and 40m on the eastern side to minimise impacts. The prospective applicant also stated other alternatives for connection to the National Grid were considered but were not conducive to the proposed development.
- **Environmental Surveys to Date** – Habitat surveys completed with further detailed vegetation surveys scheduled for early Summer 2020. Breeding and winter bird surveys ongoing since winter 2016 and bat surveys ongoing since winter 2017. Barn owl surveys complete. Mammal surveys scheduled for early summer 2020. Aquatic surveys ongoing. Baseline noise survey completed in Q3 2019. Site investigations, geological and hydrogeological testing carried out in Q1 2020. Preliminary forestry and cultural heritage surveys completed in Q4 2019. Turbine delivery route survey completed in Q1 2020.
- **Public Consultation** – the prospective applicant said there is large number of the local community involved with over 25 landowners under option. A community Liaison Officer was appointed in Q3 2019 with an organic approach adopted for public consultation. The prospective applicant states there is positive feedback and interest from local residents and various interest groups. A community benefit fund would provide half a million euro per annum for community development if or when the proposed development is complete.

- **Indicative Project Timeline** – the prospective applicant intends to finalise EIAR and planning documentation in Q3 2020 and lodge an application with the Board by the end of Q3 2020.

Discussion:

The following matters were discussed:

- The Board's representatives emphasised that at present national policy dictates that two separate SID applications for the windfarm element under section 37A and grid connection under section 182A are required for the proposed development. The Board stressed to the prospective applicant the importance of seeking their own independent legal advice regarding the feasibility of lodging one application to incorporate both windfarm and grid connection. The Board's representatives said the matter is before the Board for their consideration and that when a determination is made on how best to proceed, it will be made without prejudice and is intended as a general steer as part of the pre-application consultation process.
- The Board advised that issues of climate should be fully assessed under the climate action plan having regards to the production and transportation of turbines, carbon balance calculations and the felling of trees versus the do-nothing scenario. The prospective applicant said they intend to follow the executive guidelines for whole life carbon wind assessment.
- The Board noted that the prospective applicant referred to the development policy plan and the fact that the development site is in area eighteen which is an area open for consideration for smaller scale turbines. The Board stressed to the prospective applicant they will need to make a robust justification for large scale development on the site. In response to the Board's question, the prospective applicant said they intend on making

submissions to the local authority on the local development plan during the consultation period.

- The Board noted in terms of visuals there is an area to the east along the Arrigle Valley which is quite scenic and also, along the South Leinster Way. The Board suggested to the prospective applicant to incorporate both of these viewpoints when preparing visuals towards Brandon Hill and the Blackstairs. Furthermore, the Board advised the prospective applicant to take account of the cumulative visual impact of the existing wind farms and highlight the existing wind turbines in a different colour to the wind turbines in the proposed development. The Board noted the prospective applicant might seek the views of the local authority regarding the viewpoints.
- The Board noted the proximity of the River Nore and River Barrow a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to the east and north west of the development site. The prospective applicant said the main pathway is through the hydrology of the site and the grid connection crosses the SAC. The prospective applicant states that careful consideration was given to the grid route to minimise potential impact to the SAC. With regard to identifying pathways from the River Nore, the Board noted the qualifying interests of the SAC as including White Clawed Crayfish, petrifying springs, alluvial forest and oak woodlands that were possibly present in nearby sections of the SAC. The Board said in terms of peat stability, drainage and water management the prospective applicant should check the GSI landslide susceptibility mapping as it appears that turbine 10, 16 and 21 are possibly within or beside moderately high landslide susceptibility classifications.
- In response to a question from the Board, the prospective applicant said they are proposing to use two new borrow pits on site that the use of existing borrow pits can be overly complicated.

- The prospective applicant discussed the proposed haulage route from Belview Port of Waterford in Co. Kilkenny to the proposed development site. The Board advised that Waterford County Council should be consulted as there may be potential for knock on effects.
- The prospective applicant said consultation is ongoing with prescribed bodies and local authorities and a full list of those consulted can be provided at a later date.
- The prospective applicant emphasised the project is at an advanced stage in development and they do not anticipate any further significant changes to the development proposal.

Conclusion:

The record of the meeting will issue to the prospective applicant and it will be a matter for the prospective applicant to submit any comments on this if it wishes to do so. Following this, the prospective applicant should seek a second meeting with the Board or request closure to the pre-application process in writing. If closure to the pre-application is requested, the reporting inspector will complete the report and recommendation which will be forwarded to the Board for determination. A copy of the procedures will be attached, and the decision will then issue to the prospective applicant.



Rachel Kenny

Director of Planning

18th June 2020.