



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting ABP-306261-19.

<b>Development</b>	Proposed 11 no. turbine wind farm and 110 kilovolt (kV) loop-in/loop-out electricity substation. Bracklyn, Co. Westmeath.		
<b>Location</b>	Virtual Skype for Business.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> meeting		
<b>Date</b>	14/05/2020	<b>Time</b>	11:00 -12:20

<b>Attendees</b>		
<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>		
Rachel Kenny, Director of Planning (Chair)		
Karla McBride, Senior Planning Inspector		
Maeve Williams, Executive Officer	m.williams@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>		
Gavin Daly, Galetch Energy Services		
Simon Charlton, Galetch Energy Services		
Steven Drury, Bracklyn Wind Farm Limited		

## **Introduction**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant requesting pre-application consultations and advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board; 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 which will form part of the case file.
- The Board will serve notice at the conclusion of the process as to the strategic infrastructure status of the proposed development. It may form a preliminary view at an early stage in the process on the matter.
- 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 11 no. turbine wind farm and 110 kilovolt (kV) loop-in/loop-out electricity substation in Bracklyn, Co. Westmeath. The prospective applicant gave an overview of the project under the headings of:

- **Project Introduction:** The prospective applicant Galetech Energy Services is a Cavan based company that operates at a large scale of development since its establishment in 1998.
- It operates approximately 75MW in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- In 2015 – 2016 the prospective applicants started engagements with various stakeholders relating to this proposed development.
- **Context:** The proposed development is located in Co. Westmeath.
- The proposed site is made up mainly of agricultural and forestry land. There is cut away bog on the fringes of the site.
- **Site selection:** Separation distance between the wind turbine and the nearest dwellings is approximately 720m.
- The River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA & SAC is located approximately 3km from proposed wind farm.
- There is an absence of watercourses, sensitive geological features and protected viewpoints on the site.
- It is a suitable location to connect to the national electricity grid.
- **Initial Project Design:** 11 no. wind turbines, generating approximately 60MW.
- The Grid connection will be to the Finglas – Mullingar 110kV overhead line.
- The wind turbines specification is 180m in height, with two types of turbines.
- The Candidate Turbine(s) to be assessed in EIAR.
- **Environmental scoping:** Statutory consultations were held with relevant prescribed bodies, authorities and service providers.

- The Environmental Scoping & Constraints Analysis dealt with the main environmental issues (including biodiversity, land, soil, water, landscape, cultural heritage, noise, vibration, shadow flicker, and material assets).
- **Biodiversity:** The proposed site was mapped for turbine layout. It established the location of badger sets, and the various bird species present on the site.
- **Land, Soil and Water:** Originally, there was a forestry track which will now be reused for the windfarm. Cutaway bogs fringe the proposed windfarm site.
- **Cultural heritage:** The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have informed the proposed applicant that it has no objections.
- Historical features have been identified and are deemed to be of cultural heritage importance, they include ringforts, Bracklyn House and a mausoleum.
- **Noise, vibrations and shadow flicker:** There will be a 720m setback between the wind turbines and local dwellings which is further than specified in the national guidelines (and proposed revisions).
- **Emerging preferred design:**
- Turbine positions are being considered in response to identified environmental constraints (including biodiversity, land, soil, water and cultural heritage).
- Overall capacity likely to remain in excess of 50MW
- 1 no. additional grid connection option identified to east of proposed wind farm site (partially within County Meath).
- **Proposed next steps:**
- Continued evaluation of identified environmental constraints and iterative project design process,
- Preparation of Environmental Impact Assessment Report,
- Preparation of Planning Application,
- Targeted Planning Application Submission Date: December 2020.

## Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- **Environmental Impact Assessment/Natura Impact Statement:**
- Natural Heritage:
- It was noted the proposed development is located close to the River Boyne and the River Blackwater SAC & SPA and that the surrounding peatlands drain into this European site, which suggests that there may be an aquatic connection between European site and the windfarm site.
- It is also possible that bird species from several further afield European sites to the west (including the SPAs at Loughs Derravaragh, Owel & Ennell) may use the site and surrounding peatlands.
- The prospective applicant was advised that an NIS may be required.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment Report:** The prospective applicant stated that the bird survey is still underway and will be completed by December 2020, resulting in a two-year study of the wildlife in the area.
- There is a six-month completed survey for bat species and there will be a 110m set back from hedgerows.
- The findings of the scoping report have been issued to prescribed bodies and their consultants.
- **Policy:** It was noted that the Westmeath County Development Plan has identified the site as a low capacity site for wind farms and that Council policy seeks to direct wind energy developments to cutover peatland sites.
- The prospective applicant stated that council policy for wind farms does not comply with the national policy or guidelines.
- **Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2019:** The prospective applicant has considered the proposed revised guidelines and it is adjusting the noise levels, to meet the proposed criteria.
- **Roads** – It was noted that some of the access routes to the proposed development are narrow and tight for use by HGVs. The prospective applicant stated that they will consider the need to align and widen any roads along the haul route.

- The prospective applicant was also advised to take into account of the potential effect of large vehicles and traffic volumes on nearby villages/settlements in its haulage analysis.
- **Dwellings:** There is a setback of 720m from the dwellings to the nearest wind turbine.
- **Grid connection:** Three different options are being assessed at present and the current status of the options was queried. The prospective applicant stated that none of the options have been finalised at present.
- **Peatland:** It was noted that the site is surrounded by peatlands, and the presence of peat on the site, aquatic connections to the adjoining peatlands lands and familiarity with Bord na Mona's Bog Rehabilitation Plans was queried.
- The prospective applicant stated that there is a very minimal presence of peat on the site, that it is mainly located on the fringes of the site.
- The landscape is predominately comprised of agricultural land, and in particular pasture and forestry land types, and that they are aware that.
- Bord na Mona have commenced rehabilitation plans to block/unblock drains.
- **Culture Heritage:** It was noted that the site contains several heritage features including an historic house, gate lodge and gothic style gates, which are listed in the NIAH is on the national entry. The prospective applicant stated that there is a 180m set back from the heritage features.
- **Natural Heritage:** The presence of an aquatic connection between the site and the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC was queried. The prospective applicant stated that the on-site streams are mainly dry ditches which are considered to be of the lower order in terms of AA screening and NIS preparation and after two years of surveys it was concluded that there is minimal movement of wildlife within the proposed site or connections to the wider area.
- **Borrow pits/Blasting:** The need for borrow pits and the use of blasting was queried. The prospective applicant stated that it was unlikely that either would be required and that the proposed development will rely on local quarries for aggregate materials.

- **Community gain:** Approximately €400k will be provided for various activities and amenities within the local vicinity, based on government supports schemes calculations.
- **Public consultation:** Is ongoing and will be carried out using innovative ways to communicate with the public due to Covid-19 virus restrictions.
- **Other Consultations:** Intend to meet with the Roads and Planning Departments of Westmeath County Council, this has not been possible due to Covid-19 restrictions, although a number of other government agencies have been consulted.
- It was noted that Meath County Council, NPWS, IFI, and TII should also be consulted prior to lodging an application, as should An Taisce and the Heritage Council in relation to cultural heritage.
- **Preliminary view on Strategic Infrastructure:** The preliminary view is that the proposed development would constitute a strategic infrastructure development, as it meets the requirements outlined in 37B of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.
- The prospective applicant was advised not to close the pre-application process until there has been engagement with the community, the Local Authorities, government agencies and stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

The record of the meeting will issue to the prospective applicant and it will then be a matter for the prospective applicant to submit any comments on this if it wishes to do so. Following this, the prospective applicant may seek a second meeting with the Board or request closure to the pre-application process.

If closure to the pre-application process is requested, the reporting inspector will complete the report and recommendation which will be forwarded to the Board for determination. A decision will then issue to the prospective applicant.

A copy of the procedures for the making of an application to the Board are attached.

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Rachel Kenny  
Director of Planning

June 2020