



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-307075-20 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-307075-20 Proposed windfarm (21 No. wind turbines) and electricity substation, County Roscommon.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	11/06/20	Time	11 am – 12 pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Patricia Calleary, Senior Planning Inspector
Rob Mac Giollarnáth, Executive Officer r.macgiollarnath@pleanala.ie
Representing the prospective Applicant
Rob Scott, Energia
Grace Curran, Energia
Steven Drury, Gaeltech
Órla Murphy, MKO
Meabhann Crowe, MKO

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 that it wished to receive advice on from the Board. The Board mentioned the following general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process:

- 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:

- **Planning history** – Planning permission for 16 number turbine development (Seven Hills Wind Farm Phase 1) and a 19 number turbine development (Seven Hills Wind Farm Phase 2) at the current site were initially granted planning permission by An Bord Pleanála. This decision was quashed by the High Court on judicial review and subsequently, planning permission was refused by An Bord Pleanála.
- **Planning policy:**
 - Strong National and International support for additional renewable energy and de-carbonisation.

- Recent Regional policy in the RSES, recognises the opportunities for growth in renewables.
- Roscommon County Development Plan: A Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) was adopted to accompany the County Development Plan. The Development Plan aims to facilitate the appropriate development of associated infrastructure to enable the harnessing of renewable energy resources.
- The Development Plan's Wind Energy Strategy Map identifies three tiers of areas of suitability for wind development with the subject site being in the 'Most Favoured' area.
- **Site Selection** – As the proposed development site was previously subject to a planning application, the site has already been deemed appropriate for wind energy and the site selection process has already occurred. The following criteria were used: Wind resource, planning policy context, proximity to sensitive receptors, environmental/ecological sensitivity and designations; grid capacity, landscape capacity, land-use, access and infrastructure.
- **Proposed development** – The proposed wind energy development will likely comprise up to approximately 21 No. wind turbines, access roads and entrances, with electricity substation and associated control buildings. The proposed output of the wind farm will be approximately 105MW.
- **Grid connection** – The proposed connection will be assessed as part of the EIAR. It is planned that there be an on-site substation with a connection to the national grid via an underground connection.
- **Project Design/Constraints** – Project design was informed through the application of a site constraints process which considers the following set back/buffer distances: Dwellings (720m – non-associated properties); Designated Sites (200m); Rivers/streams (50m); Telecommunications Links (operator specific buffer); Neighbouring existing or permitted wind turbines (2.5 x rotor distance). The application of the foregoing constraints results in the viable area for the provision of turbines.
- **Scoping and Pre-Application Consultation** – A Scoping Document providing details of the proposed project and the site of the proposed development has recently been completed and is due to be issued to relevant

bodies. Additional pre-application consultations with Roscommon County Council have been sought (no meeting held yet).

- **Public Consultation:** The Seven Hills project website is currently hosted on Energia website. It will be continually updated as the project develops through various phases. Community liaison officers have been appointed to engage with interested parties and communities. Public consultation was postponed due to public health concerns relating to Covid-19. Door to door consultation begun in February/March 2020 within a 2 km radius of the proposed wind farm and had to cease (Covid-19). Information leaflets have been posted to all 470 households within 2km radius of proposed wind farm. Advertisement campaign began in April 2020 on local radio along with press release local newspaper. Appointments can be made with community liaison officers (these will start in July). It is planned to hold consultation clinic days in July 2020 to be held in the local area and in Athlone town.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment Report** – There was a brief outline of the Chapters that would constitute the EIAR.

Discussion:

The following matters were discussed:

- The prospective applicant outlined the criteria for reaching the threshold for strategic infrastructure development and stated their view that the project would meet the threshold. The Board's representatives stated their general agreement with this assessment and noted as always that the final conclusion would rest with the Board.
- Two routes were currently being considered as options for connecting to the electricity network.
- There was some discussion as to whether the wind-farm itself and the electricity element of the project could be lodged as one project. The Board was currently seeking legal advice regarding this same issue and the prospective applicant may wish to do likewise. Although the Board did not share legal advice received it would offer as much guidance as was possible on the subject at subsequent meetings.

- The Board's representatives pointed out that the site location was quite a unique landscape in itself and also in visual terms with prominent features, stone walls, graveyards and archaeological features present. There were also significant hydrology and hydrological features.
- Reference was made by the Board's representatives to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006. Arising from the Balz court case it was clear that regard must be had to more up-to-date scientific studies and guidelines (even if they were in draft form).
- Public consultation had been interrupted somewhat by the Covid-19 crisis but was due to resume shortly with one-to-one meetings planned.
- It appeared that although the prospective applicant had sought to meet with stakeholders no meetings had, as of yet, been held. The Board's representatives stated that holding a meeting with the NPWS regarding the proposed project was advisable.

Conclusion:

The record of the instant meeting will issue. The prospective applicant can then respond with their own comments on issues raised in the record. It may be that a further meeting will be held to clarify and to develop issues.

Ciara Kellett
Director of Planning