



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-308018-20 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-308018-20 Development of a 110kV substation at Milltown, County Meath.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	14/10/20	Start Time	11 a.m.
Location	N/A	End Time	11.50 a.m.

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Staff Members
Brendan Wyse, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Karla McBride, Senior Planning Inspector
Kieran Somers, Executive Officer
Representing the Prospective Applicant
Robert Roche, Director, Harmony Solar
Claire Atkins, Senior Engineer, Fehily Timoney
David Moore, Senior Planner, Fehily Timoney

The meeting commenced at 11 a.m.

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 prospective applicant provided the Board with an overview of the proposed development which comprises a 110kV substation which is intended to provide connection for a solar farm to the national grid employing a loop-in/loop-out connection.

The subject site for the proposed substation is located at Milltown Townland, approximately three kilometres south of Kells and two kilometres south-west of the M3 Motorway; site access to the proposed substation will be from the L6835 local road. The prospective applicant advised that planning permission for the solar farm component of the overall project consists of two parcels of land (North Parcel and South Parcel).

The prospective applicant set out the context of the subject site and advised that it is located on agricultural lands and not close to residential dwellings. There is an adjacent 110kV overhead transmission line and the proposed infrastructure is outside flood risk zones. There are no recorded monuments on the subject site and on-site biodiversity resources will be protected and enhanced.

In relation to the proposed development itself, the prospective applicant stated that it is located on a 2.2-hectare site (approximately) and that a five-metre wide site road will provide access to the public road network. Two end masts will be linked to the proposed substation by underground cabling and the proposed development will incorporate associated site works and drainage. A compound will be provided for Eirgrid and allowance for possible Eirgrid expansion in the future (as per Eirgrid's requirements) will also be facilitated.

In respect of the associated solar farm component of the overall project, the prospective applicant stated that this will employ photovoltaic technology to generate renewable energy for the national grid. The prospective applicant referred to the fact that sustainable renewable energy projects of this kind are supported by various local, regional and national plans such as the Climate Action Plan.

The prospective applicant advised that the preliminary design is underway and that it is intended that a single Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment Screening Report/Natura Impact Statement will be produced for the overall project. The prospective applicant set out the main headings which it would intend to address in the Planning and Environmental Report and said that screening reports for EIA and AA will be produced. The prospective applicant added that an NIS will be undertaken if Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required.

With regard to the legislative context and precedent decisions, the prospective applicant noted that the proposed development, the subject of the instant pre-application consultation request, relates solely to the proposed 110kV substation and associated works; the solar farm element will be the subject of a planning application to the relevant local authority. The prospective applicant referred to some precedent SID decisions by the Board and noted that the Board has taken the view that a node which forms part of the national transmission network constitutes strategic infrastructure development.

Lastly, the prospective applicant recapped on the nature and extent of the proposed development and offered its opinion that the proposed 110kV substation would constitute SID as it will form a node on the national transmission network. The prospective applicant concluded by stating that the proposed substation would be a key component of the associated proposed solar farm which will enhance the national transmission network and make a material contribution to the achievement of national and regional renewable energy and climate change targets.

Board's comments/queries:

The Board's representatives enquired as to the status of the associated solar farm which will be the subject of a separate planning application to the relevant local authority. The prospective applicant replied that assessments and design components are still being worked upon and that its intention is to lodge the planning application prior to the end of 2020.

The Board noted the proximity of the proposed development to the River Blackwater (an SAC and SPA) and advised the prospective applicant to carry out robust screening in this regard, as well as thorough assessments of bird movements.

The Board enquired as to whether consultations have been held with representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service or Inland Fisheries Ireland. The prospective applicant replied that assessments such as aquatic studies are being undertaken and that it intends to consult with these two bodies as soon as the site design is further advanced.

In terms of cultural heritage, the Board reminded the prospective applicant of the need for robust assessments. The prospective applicant advised that preliminary field work has been undertaken in this regard and that it intends to engage with the Department in relation to any unrecorded monuments in the vicinity of the subject site. The prospective applicant added that the preliminary results of studies are reporting a low level of risk with respect to impacts on cultural heritage.

The Board's representatives also advised that the matter of visual impact needs to be assessed as robustly as possible in relation to the proposed development and any effects on the River Blackwater Valley. The prospective applicant replied that no significant visual effects have been identified up to this point in time; it added that photomontages will be provided as part of the planning application.

In response to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that there will be some activity with respect to haul routes and that such activity may be conducted on a phased basis. With regard to the M3 Motorway, the prospective applicant said that any traffic impacts arising are usually short-term. The prospective applicant confirmed that the local road to be used for access is the L6835 and, in response to the Board's query, said that it would consider additional works to this road if so required.

The prospective applicant said that its consultation phase apropos the proposed development has just begun and that it hasn't had engagement yet with the roads section of the local authority or with Transport Infrastructure Ireland. As regards public consultations, the prospective applicant signalled that it intends a postal method in the first instance given current Covid restrictions; it added that it would be happy to facilitate one-to-one meetings with members of the public and landowners

in the vicinity if so requested. In response to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that it has not received any substantive feedback from members of the public as of yet, but that it intends to engage in public consultations prior to the lodgement of the aforementioned planning applications.

In respect of the prospective applicant's query on a combined Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment Screening Report/NIS for the entire project, the Board said that this would appear to be the most sensible and expedient approach.

In response to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant clarified that the access road to the subject site will be approximately 400 metres in length.

With regard to the solar farm component of the project, the Board noted the possibility of the local authority decision being appealed to it; in such circumstances, the SID application and planning appeal would be reported upon and decided by the Board in tandem.

Conclusion:

The Board advised the prospective applicant that it is open to it to keep the pre-application process open for the time being and said that further meetings can be facilitated.

The record of the instant meeting will issue in the meantime and the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of a further meeting. The onus is on the prospective applicant to either request a further meeting or formal closure of the instant pre-application consultation process.

The meeting concluded at 11.50 a.m.

Brendan Wyse

Assistant Director of Planning