



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-308422-20

Development	Proposed development of a 110kV Substation within the townland of Ballyvalode, Co. Limerick		
Location	Within the townland of Ballyvalode, Co. Limerick		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
Meeting	1 st meeting	07/12/2020	11:00 – 11.40

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)

Sarah Lynch, Senior Planning Inspector

Jennifer Sherry,
Executive Officer

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Representing the Prospective Applicant

Robert Roche, Programme Manager, Harmony Solar

Claire Atkins, Senior Engineer, Fehily Timoney

David Moore, Senior Planner, Fehily Timoney

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 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 a brief background to Harmony Solar as a company that has recently partnered with ESB from March this year to develop up to 1,500MW of large-scale solar projects throughout Ireland at different locations with ESB ultimately building and owning the projects. The prospective applicant Harmony Solar Limerick

Limited, is a company set up to develop a solar energy generation facility on lands near Oola Village, Co. Limerick.

The prospective applicant gave an overview of the project and made a presentation under the following headings:

- **Site location** – the proposed development is located in the townland of Ballyvalode, approximately 2.5km near the village of Oola and 2km north of the N24 national road. Site access to the substation will be linked to the R507 regional road. In the presentation provided, on the site location map, the area marked red will be the location of the substation with the surrounding green areas the location of the solar farm element of the project.
- **Site selection & context** - the prospective applicant advised the overall selection of the site is good, as the proposed development is located on agricultural lands, away from adjacent residences, outside a flood risk zone, with mature hedgerows and tree lines for screening, with no recorded monuments on the lands and with on-site biodiversity resources protected and enhanced. However, there is a river crossing on the site.
- **Proposed development** – is a 110kV ‘loop-in/ loop-out’ electrical substation to an adjoining 110kV overhead line on a site of approximately 6.5 hectares comprising three elements:
 1. Security and safety fencing with independent power producer compound with switch room building (c.216sq.m).
 2. EirGrid compound with substation building (c.440sq.m), electrical equipment and lightening mast.
 3. Allowance for expansion area (per EirGrid requirements).

An internal link road will provide access across the site and to the public road network R507. The tallest structure inside the proposed development site is two number end masts (c.16m in height) linked to the substation by underground cabling. Landscaping will be provided as required.

- **Associated solar farm development** – the prospective applicant emphasised general support for solar energy at national and regional level. The proposed solar farm is broken up into three parcels of land the north block, central block and southern block. The central and southern block are linked by internal access roads throughout the site and the northern block is connected along the R507. A number of assessments and reports are being undertaken by the prospective applicant including a glint and glare assessment. The solar farm will be submitted to the Local Authority for permission and is not part of this SID Pre-Application consultation. However, the prospective applicant intends to submit a single Appropriate Assessment / Natura Impact Statement under one cover for the overall project for both the substation and solar farm array.
- **Accompanying reports for substation** – the planning and environmental report will take a whole project approach and include a number of topics as set out in the presentation.
- **Legislative overview & precedent decisions** – the prospective applicant states the proposed development complies with section 182A(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended). As such the proposed substation will, by way of ‘loop-in / loop-out’ connection effectively become a node for the 110kV overhead line and will form part of the national transmission network. The prospective applicant referenced comparable applications for 110kV substations that were determined strategic infrastructure development by An Bord Pleanála.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- In response to the Board’s representatives query the prospective applicant said the regional road R507 provides the only access to the site. The prospective applicant advised other options were looked at but were not feasible. The R507 is in good condition with capacity for two-way haulage traffic to and from the proposed development site and offers connectivity to the N24. It is not envisaged that road

improvement works along the route will be required. The prospective applicant said they have not undertaken consultation with the Road Section in Limerick City and County Council at present. The Board's representatives advised that consultations should be held with the Local Authority.

- The Board's representatives enquired what stage Appropriate Assessment screening is at and if the river on site has any hydrological connections to the catchment area of the nearest Special Protection Area (SPA). The prospective applicant stated the proposed site for the substation does not have any pathways however, when taking the project as a whole with the solar farm element there is some integration in the south river network. The prospective applicant advised some mitigation measures will need to be implemented to the Mulcair River which joins the River Shannon. As such a Natura Impact Statement may be required for the project. The Board stressed there is a requirement to be very clear around mitigation and the prospective applicant should submit a schedule for mitigation measures.
- The Board's representatives advised their preliminary view is that the proposed development would constitute a strategic infrastructure development, ultimately however, this is a decision for the Board to make.
- The Board's representatives referred to the project approach suggested by the prospective applicant for the Appropriate Assessment / Natura Impact Assessment and planning reports and advised it is important to distinguish between the two different elements, and ensure it is clear which sections of the application are seeking permission from An Bord Pleanála and the local authority. The Board's representatives emphasised the need to address the cumulative impacts for both projects.
- The prospective applicant advised they are still at the information gathering stage when looking at the solar farm with the local authority. It is hoped to lodge the application in March, 2021. In response to the Board's query the prospective applicant stated they have not undertaken any public consultation at this stage. It is proposed to write out to all residents within a 1km distance of the site with an

information sheet setting out the key elements of the project and how they can make observations.

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 or at the time of a further meeting. It will be a matter for the prospective applicant to revert to the Board when it requires a further meeting or as indicated requests closure.

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

Ciara Kellett
Assistant Director of Planning