



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of 1st Meeting

ABP-310026-21

Development	Proposed development of a 110kV substation at Dennistown Solar Energy Development and a 110kV underground cable to Wexford substation		
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	30/06/2021	Time	15:00p.m. – 15:50p.m.
Attendees			
Representing An Bord Pleanála			
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)			
Mairead Kenny, Senior Planning Inspector			
Jennifer Sherry, Executive Officer	j.sherry@pleanala.ie	01-8737266	
Representing the Prospective Applicant			
Rita Mansfield, Fehily Timoney			
Robert Roche, Harmony Solar			
Barry Linehan, ESB			

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 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

The prospective applicant provided background information on ESB (Solar) Ireland Limited and Fehily Timoney & Company. ESB is involved as a partner with Harmony Solar to develop a number of ground-mounted solar projects in Ireland with a view to connecting these developments to the national electricity grid.

The proposed development is for a 110kV substation and 110kV underground cable to be called Dennistown substation on the site of consented Dennistown Solar Farm. The emerging preferred solution is to locate the 110kV substation within the site of Dennistown Solar Farm which is approximately 800m south-east of Murntown village, 800m south-west of Piercetown village and 6.5 km from Wexford Town. It is proposed to use an existing lane as access to the site and locate the substation at this entrance. The site primarily consists of agricultural lands and pockets of forestry. The underground cable will connect to the existing Wexford substation (a 110kV node on the national grid operated and controlled by EirGrid).

The prospective applicant discussed the need for the proposed development and highlighted that ESB has five solar projects in South Wexford. Therefore, grid connection options are being developed as consented solar projects proceed to delivery phase. The purpose of the proposed development is to provide a high voltage tail fed substation and underground cable in order to feed up to 170MW of renewable energy from consented solar energy developments (Growtown, Tracystown, Newtown, Ralptown and Mayglass) into the national electricity grid at Wexford substation. It has not been determined how the other solar energy developments in the vicinity shall connect to Dennistown 110kV hub but this will be determined at a future date.

The prospective applicant set out the planning history for Dennistown Solar Farm which included a 38kV electrical substation in the permission granted under register reference number 2016110 and associated planning appeal case reference number ABP Ref. 247801. It is expected that the proposed 110kV substation will remain generally in the same location as the permitted 38kV substation. The prospective applicant included two maps in the presentation provided that illustrated two proposed site layout plans as Option A and Option B. The cable route for the consented 38kV electrical substation was subject to a Section 5 Exempted Development Declaration from Wexford County Council. The prospective applicant advised it is anticipated that the proposed 110kV underground cable grid connection to Wexford substation will take a similar route.

In addressing the criteria set out in section 37A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended the prospective applicant stated its opinion that the proposed development is to facilitate local electricity transmission only and as such does not qualify as being of economic/social importance. Also, it stated that the proposed development in of itself does not contribute substantially to the fulfillment of the broad objective in the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. The prospective applicant concluded it does not consider the proposed development to be a strategic infrastructure development and it is intended to request a 30+ year lifetime permission to align with lifetimes available for the technology.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed as part of the meeting:

- The Board's representatives enquired if the proposed Dennistown 110kV substation would form a node on the transmission system and if there will be any additional capacity. The prospective applicant advised Dennistown substation will connect to Wexford substation which is a node on the transmission system. Also, it advised there is potential for other projects in the area to form a connection to Dennistown substation subject to reaching an agreement with ESB.
- The Board's representatives noted the prospective applicant is in discussions with EirGrid and questioned if it is possible that EirGrid could at some point in the future request capacity on this site. The prospective applicant said there is a requirement for land for the future expansion of the substation and stated EirGrid at this time have not asked for any additional capacity. The prospective applicant clarified only part of the proposed development would be a contestable asset to be handed over to EirGrid.

- The Board's representatives referred to section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended as the applicable legislation for electricity applications. The Board's representatives also referenced a recent decision by the Board for case reference number ABP-308120-20 for a tail fed 110kV substation in Rhode, Co. Offaly which was determined as being a strategic infrastructure development. The Board's representatives noted the proposed development is not strictly private as part of the land will be handed over to EirGrid.
- The prospective applicant said one of the determining factors in deciding if the proposed development is strategic infrastructure or not is the 30 year lifetime on the permission and the contract with the landowners is with Harmony Solar and no other developers.
- The Board's representatives noted that the planning application for the consented Dennistown Solar Farm was not accompanied by an EIAR. The Board's representatives advised notwithstanding the history in this case EIA screening is becoming more complex and the prospective applicant should review it for the proposed development. Furthermore, the Board's representatives stated that if it is necessary to do a stage 2 Appropriate Assessment involving preparation and submission of a NIS, it is not advisable to screen out qualifying interests at stage 1 screening and all qualifying interests should be brought forward to stage 2.

Conclusion

The Board's representatives stated their preliminary opinion is that the proposed development would constitute a strategic infrastructure development but noted that it is ultimately a decision for the Board. It was recommended that a second meeting would be beneficial, and the Board could accommodate same as soon as possible.

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 a close of the pre-application process in writing. If closure of the

pre-application is requested, the reporting inspector will complete the report and recommendation which will be forwarded to the Board for determination.

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning