



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting ABP-310369-21 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	ABP-310369-21 Windfarm development comprising of 15 wind turbines, 1 no. 110kV electrical substation and all associated development works. Glenard (and other townlands), County Donegal.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1st / 2nd / 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	10/09/21	<b>Start Time</b>	11:02 a.m.
<b>Location</b>	N/A	<b>End Time</b>	12:30 p.m.

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>
<b>Staff Members</b>
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Sarah Lynch, Senior Planning Inspector
Niamh Thornton, Executive Officer
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>
Emmet McLoughlin
Jimmy Greene
Meabhann Crowe
Sinead O'Malley
Eoin McCarthy

The meeting commenced at 11.02 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's representatives 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.
- 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 informed the Board's representatives that the wind farm development under discussion has been subject to a previous Strategic Infrastructure Development determination under An Bord Pleanála reference ABP-305388-19. The proposed development at the time was determined to be SID. The prospective applicant is going through the pre-application consultation process again because of design and layout changes from that considered by the Board under ABP-305388-19.

The prospective applicant gave a brief history of Coillte and highlighted that the prospective applicant's name would likely be changing during the pre-application process to represent a joint venture between Coillte and ESB. The prospective applicant will write to the Board to confirm this change before the close of the pre-application process.

The prospective applicant noted that the planning policy context remains unchanged in its support of this kind of development since the last pre-application consultation, noting, in particular, strong national and international support for renewable energy, the Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Donegal County Development Plan 2018-2024.

The prospective applicant gave an overview of the site selection process and site location. The prospective applicant stated that a hen harrier roost was identified after the closing of the last pre-application consultation, which led to the necessity to restructure the wind farm layout. The prospective applicant referred to a number of drawings showing the change in design and layout of the proposed wind farm.

Details of the proposed development were described. The proposed wind farm project will provide for 15 turbines with a generating capacity of approximately 4MW-6MW each, resulting in a minimum installed capacity of c. 72MW. Tip heights will be in the range of 162 metres to 173 metres, hub heights in the range of 96 metres to 107 metres and rotor diameter in the range of 132 metres to 140 metres. An associated 110kV substation and 110kV underground grid connection and other ancillary works will be included in the application. The grid connection route will follow existing forestry tracks and local roads and will be 8km in length. The

prospective applicant has been in consultation with Donegal County Council Roads Department regarding the connection.

The prospective applicant referred to some accommodation works which will be necessary along the turbine delivery haul route. It was clarified that any new links created would be closed off and original road boundaries re-instated after turbine delivery.

An EIA scoping document was issued to statutory and non-statutory consultees in August 2019. The proposed development site is 4.5km from the Northern Ireland boundary and it has been acknowledged that there may be potential for transboundary effects to arise. Having regard to feedback received from consultations with Northern Ireland agencies, the public notices will incorporate reference to transboundary effects and copies of the application will be issued to the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland.

The prospective applicant has been consulting with the public through door-to-door engagement, zoom meetings and written updates. A final project booklet is currently being produced.

The prospective applicant gave a breakdown of the chapters to be included in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. Photomontages were displayed from various viewpoints around the development area.

In regard to meeting the criteria for Strategic Infrastructure Development, the prospective applicant submits that the proposed development will exceed the 7<sup>th</sup> Schedule Development threshold and complies with the first two criteria of section 37A(2) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

### **Discussion:**

The Board's representatives noted the significant number of turbines in the area and advised that a robust assessment of the cumulative impacts be included in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. Cumulative impacts in terms of visual impacts, biodiversity and hydrogeology in particular were indicated as areas requiring significant baseline surveys and robust assessment within the EIAR.

The Board's representatives referred to other Wind Energy projects in the area and the cumulative impact assessments carried out for these projects.

With regard to ornithology, the Board's representative made particular reference to breeding curlew in the area, resting lands for migrating Golden Plover and the presence of Whooper Swans at Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle and stated that the accuracy of bird surveys and baseline data was of significant importance to the assessment of the proposed development.

The Board's representative referred to the Lough Swilly SPA and the Lough Foyle SPA and the requirement to robustly assess the impacts to qualifying interests of these designated sites. The prospective applicant stated that they were aware of a Hen Harrier roost within the site boundary and reiterated that this was the reason for the boundary change. The prospective applicant further stated that bird surveys have been carried out over a 3 year period.

The Board's representative questioned the prospective applicant in relation to the existing peat depths encountered at the site. In terms of peat strength, the prospective applicant stated that geotechnical investigations carried out indicated that the area was well drained with strong peat strengths and stability. The Board's representative referred to the documented incidence of peat slides in the area which is mapped on the GSI mapping system and stated that the prospective applicant should take this into account. The prospective applicant was satisfied that the site was outside of these areas indicated on the GSI mapping.

The Board's representative stated that adequate consideration in relation to the potential for impacts to the hydrogeological regime in the area is required and referred the prospective applicant to recent cases whereby such issues arose.

The Board's representative also asked the prospective applicant to adequately consider mitigation measures and monitoring measures in relation to the protection of peatlands within the EIAR. The prospective applicant stated that this would be considered within the EIAR to be submitted.

The prospective applicant stated that they have requested a meeting with the NPWS.

The Board's representative requested clarification in relation to the quantum of forestry to be felled to facilitate the development. It was clarified that 85 hectares would be felled. The prospective applicant stated that alternative lands have been identified and these replanting lands will be assessed as part of the cumulative impact assessment.

The prospective applicant referred to the transboundary nature of the development in terms of the EIAR and the Board's representative stated that such matters would be considered by the Board.

The Board's representative inquired about the public consultation process and the prospective applicant stated that responses have been positive to date but that further consultation would be carried out.

The grid connection route was indicated by the applicant and stated to be largely within the public road. The Board's representative stated that this element of the development should also be considered in terms of the cumulative impacts.

**Conclusion:**

The Board's representative advised the prospective applicant a further meeting can be facilitated should it be required.

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 any 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 12:30 p.m.

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**Ciara Kellett**

**Assistant Director of Planning**