

**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Record of Meeting ABP-310507-21 1st meeting

Description	ABP-310507-21 Proposed substation and associated grid connection, site at Tulla Road, Ennis, Co. Clare		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation.		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Venue	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Date	16/09/2021	Time	11:00am – 11:50am

Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Donal Donnelly, Senior Planning Inspector		
Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer	s.caulfield@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
Representing the Prospective Applicant		
Tom McNamara, Development Manager, Tom McNamara & Partners		
Andrew Warren, Project Manager, Tom McNamara & Partners		
James O'Donoghue, Quantity Surveyor, Tom McNamara & Partners		
Rob Davies, Architect, ARC-MC		
Robert Thorogood, Mechanical & Electrical Engineer, HDR Hurley Palmer Flatt		
Ronan Geoghegan, Civil Engineer, Clifton Scannell Emerson Associates		
Teri Hayes, Environmental Consultant, Awn Consulting		
Stephen Blair, Planning Consultant, John Spain Associates		

Introduction:

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 15th June 2021, 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 in any legal proceedings.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the site location of the proposed development. The overall landholding is approximately 60 hectares in area and is located to the north east of Ennis town, Co. Clare. It is intended to develop a data centre campus on this site. The campus would consist of six data centre halls, an energy centre, and a vertical farm (to capture surplus heat generated from the data halls) together with all ancillary infrastructure works. The proposal the subject of this pre-application consultation relates to the substation and associated grid connection elements of the overall development.

The prospective applicant said that a planning application had been lodged with Clare County Council in July 2021 for the development of the data centre campus (Planning Reference: 21757) and the application is currently at a further information stage. This application was accompanied by an EIAR which assessed the totality of the campus development, including the component submitted under this pre-application consultation. It is intended to submit the same EIAR with any subsequent application for the substation and grid connection.

In order to facilitate the campus development, the prospective applicant stated that it is necessary to take down a number of high voltage grid lines which traverse the site.

The prospective applicant noted that the proposed site had been identified by the planning authority with a specific use for a data centre campus. The planning authority carried out a variation to the County Council Development Plan in 2019 and therefore the proposed site is now zoned to accommodate a data centre campus with associated power generation and an energy centre.

The prospective applicant said that discussions are currently ongoing with Eirgrid in relation to the substation, the grid connection, and the downing of the overhead power lines.

In regard to meeting the criteria of Strategic Infrastructure Development, the prospective applicant submits that the proposed development would fall within the criteria for SID as it would form part of the transmission system and would be a node on the national electricity grid.

The prospective applicant provided the Board's representatives with an outline of the existing and proposed 110kV circuit schematic and also provided an extract from Eirgrid's Area Schematic. The prospective applicant stated that the existing substation is a very important node for Eirgrid while also providing linkages at 220kV to the rest of the country.

Due to site constraints and the proximity to the M18 Motorway and other local roads, it is not possible to extend the existing Ennis substation.

The prospective applicant provided the Board's representatives with drawings of the existing two 110kV overhead lines that traverse the site and stated that the proposed substation would be formed from the undergrounding of these two existing overhead cables, taken to a switchyard and then rerouted onto the existing Ennis substation.

The prospective applicant highlighted that the substation compound has two elements, the first is a 110kV switchyard (to be fully adopted by Eirgrid) and the second is the step-down transformation for the prospective applicant themselves which could be privately owned or adopted by Eirgrid.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:


- The prospective applicant confirmed that the proposed development would be a looped in connection rather than tail-fed. They also said it is important to note Eirgrid's standard arrangement for GIS substations is eight bays. The proposed development would utilise six bays, leaving two spare bays for future expansion/development.
- 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.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant confirmed that the same EIAR submitted to the planning authority for the section 34 application would be submitted as part of the proposed development.

- With regard to the gas energy centre, the prospective applicant stated that, as agreed with Eirgrid, a maximum of 83 megawatts can be taken from the grid substation. Including all six data centres the prospective applicant hopes to reach 200 megawatts and therefore would need to supplement the additional 120 megawatts of power onto the site. The engines intended to be fitted are dual fuel, normally running on gas but have the ability to switch to diesel for back up, if required. The prospective applicant also noted that there is an existing gas line on the site and its connection has been agreed with Bord Gáis.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to consider the potential impact on residential amenity. The prospective applicant stated that there are a small number of houses along the Tulla Road. It stated that these residents have actively been consulted and engaged with and letters of consent have been received from all. The prospective applicant stated that they have been very mindful of potential impacts to residents in the area and advised that all data halls would be located over 100 metres from the nearest property. They also noted that extensive landscape and visual assessments have been carried out to demonstrate how the buildings would appear on the landscape.
- With regard to ecology, the Board's representatives made particular reference to badger and lesser horseshoe bat which are present in the locality. The prospective applicant agreed and stated that as part of the EIAR a full baseline for ecology had been completed. They noted that all elements have been addressed and mitigation measures are included for all habitats on the site.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that a full NIS was required and submitted as part of the Section 34 application. The Board's representatives advised to prepare a thorough NIS in any application for the proposed development. The prospective applicant confirmed the Lower River Shannon SAC is the only European Site in respect of which the proposed development has the potential to have a significant effect.
- The prospective applicant confirmed the highest point of the substation would be 15 metres, which is a standard requirement for Eirgrid.

- In regard to the presentation of the EIAR and documentation, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to be extremely clear in identifying the elements of the project which fall under section 34 and section 182 to ensure there is no ambiguity. This was noted by the prospective applicant.
- In response to a query on the matter, the Board's representatives said it would be a matter for the prospective applicant to decide if they wanted to time the applications to run concurrently with each other should the Data Centre application be appealed into the Board and should the Board decide that the substation is a SID application.
- The prospective applicant clarified that the waste heat from the data halls would be used to supply low grade heat to the vertical farm in order to grow high value crops such as herbs and lettuce. It noted that the vertical farm is part of the low carbon strategy for the proposed development.

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. It will be a matter for the prospective applicant to revert to the Board if it requires a further meeting or if it wishes to close the pre-application consultation process.

 23/9/21

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning