



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting ABP-311299-21 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	ABP-311299-21 Construction of 9 wind turbines and associated works at Gortloughra, Kealkill, Bantry, Co. Cork.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1st / 2nd / 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	15/11/21	<b>Start Time</b>	11.30 a.m.
<b>Location</b>	N/A	<b>End Time</b>	12.45 p.m.

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>
<b>Staff Members</b>
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Mairead Kenny, Senior Planning Inspector
Kieran Somers, Executive Officer
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>
Andrew O'Grady, Jennings O'Donovan
David Kiely, Jennings O'Donovan
Marc McLoughlin, EMPower
Michael O'Connor, EMPower
Robert Greene, EMPower
Richard Barker, Macroworks

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's representatives with a background of the nature and extent of the proposed development which is for nine wind turbines with an overall output capacity of 54 megawatts. The subject site for the proposed development is located 9.7 kilometres north-west of Dunmanway (and approximately 16 kilometres distance from Bantry) and would also involve the construction of an on-site 110kV substation and a 110kV grid connection to facilitate the proposed development.

The prospective applicant outlined the nature of the subject site and also referred to some constraints which exist apropos the proposed development; the prospective applicant advised that there will be buffers with respect to sensitive receptors such as residential dwellings, streams and watercourses. The current site layout for the proposed development was presented. The grid connection route options were set out by the prospective applicant (two options with regard to Dunmanway and two options to Sheen Loop) as well as turbine delivery route options.

With respect to local community engagement, the prospective applicant reported that a community liaison officer has been appointed for the project; a project-specific website has also been set up and there are further public consultations planned.

The prospective applicant referred to the wind energy strategy as it pertains to the area in question and pointed out that the subject site is designated Open to Consideration in the current Cork County Development Plan.

With regard to scoping for the proposed development, the prospective applicant advised that scoping will be undertaken with the relevant stakeholders and that the scoping document will issue to these in due course. The prospective applicant listed some of the key stakeholders that it intends to engage with in this regard.

With respect to survey work, the prospective applicant reported that such surveys will include habitat surveys, protected species surveys, aquatic surveys, bat activity surveys and ornithological surveys. With regard to the matter of landscape and visual impact, the prospective applicant advised that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is being prepared and 29 viewpoint locations selected. The prospective

applicant also referred to survey work which has been conducted with respect to archaeology and cultural heritage and hydrology, geology and hydrogeology. With regard to noise impact, the prospective applicant advised that baseline noise monitoring will be undertaken at six locations.

With regard to the matter of environmental impact assessment, the prospective applicant stated that EIA will cover topics including biodiversity, noise, shadow flicker, visual amenity and traffic and transport.

The prospective applicant noted that the closest European Sites to the subject site are the Bandon River SAC and the Derryclogher (Knockboy) Bog SAC. The closest SPA is the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA which is located approximately 20 kilometres to the north-east.

The prospective applicant also noted that the project sites are located within a freshwater pearl mussel sensitive catchment. With regard to the matter of peat stability, the prospective applicant advised that peat is generally relatively thin across the subject site with only some isolated pockets of deeper peat occurring. The prospective applicant stated its opinion that peat stability is not considered high risk at this current stage of the assessment.

With regard to noise, the prospective applicant said that 23 sensitive receptors have been identified within two kilometres of the proposed turbines; it added that a set-back distance of a minimum 700 metres has been maintained between residential dwellings and the proposed turbine locations.

With respect to archaeology and cultural heritage, the prospective applicant said that whilst there are 23 existing recorded archaeological monuments located within the site boundary, none of these are national monuments, nor are there any national monuments within five kilometres of the subject site. In relation to landscape and visual amenity, the prospective applicant stated that the proposed development is located mostly in Area 15a landscape character area in the current county development plan; this is designated Ridged and Peaked Upland. The prospective applicant noted that the eastern most proposed turbine is located in landscape character area 12b which is designated Rolling Marginal and Forested Middleground.

The prospective applicant outlined the nature and extent of viewpoint analysis it has undertaken to date and provided the Board's representatives with some examples of these viewpoints (VP2, VP8, VP18 and VP21).

As regards future steps, the prospective applicant referred to its intended timetable which currently envisages a planning application lodgement sometime in Quarter 2 2022. With respect to this planning application, the prospective applicant stated its opinion that the proposed development would be considered strategic infrastructure development given that exceeds the relevant threshold of the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (54 megawatts and construction of related 110kV substation and grid connection), and also that it satisfies the criteria set out under Section 37A(2) of the Act.

#### **Board's comments/queries:**

The Board's representatives noted the presence of peat at the subject site and enquired as to whether any peat extraction has taken place. The prospective applicant replied that no peat extraction has taken place and that the land is currently used for sheep grazing.

The Board enquired as to whether any tree felling would be involved as part of the proposed development. The prospective applicant replied that no tree felling is proposed.

With respect to the recent Derryadd wind farm court judgement, the Board reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of this particular decision. The prospective applicant said that it was aware of this judgement.

With respect to the proposed grid connection to facilitate the proposed development, the Board said that it would generally be useful if the context of other developments in the vicinity of the proposed development was set out in the planning application. In response to the Board's queries, the prospective applicant said that the grid connection would be stand-alone in nature and it added that it is due to consult with EirGrid on this. With regard to a potential connection to Sheen Loop, the prospective

applicant explained that this is a new loop-in station which is due to be constructed by Eirgrid; it added that further consultations with Eirgrid are required.

With respect to existing access tracks on the subject site, the Board asked the prospective applicant to revert to it on the planning status of these. The prospective applicant agreed to do so.

With regard to the Draft Wind Guidelines, the Board noted that regard should be had to these. The prospective applicant said that it was aware of this and said that the design of the proposed wind farm would comply with these.

In relation to consultations held to date, the Board's representatives enquired as to whether any specific issues have been raised by stakeholders and/or members of the public. The prospective applicant said that there have been no specific issues and that matters raised included set-back distances, visual impacts, potential effects on water sources and community gain. Noting the relatively sparse population in the vicinity of the site, the Board also encouraged further engagement with the local community and with recreation and/or ecology interest groups in the wider area. The Board also suggested that the prospective applicant engage with all relevant prescribed bodies.

With regard to biodiversity, the Board said that the baseline guidance for biodiversity surveys should be set out as clearly as possible in the planning application. The Board's representatives also advised that in screening for Appropriate Assessment it would not be appropriate to screen out particular qualifying interests as the screening should focus on the European sites as a whole.

In relation to the matter of landscape and visual assessment, the Board noted the focus on cumulative impact and the consideration given to whether there would be significant disparity in proposed turbine heights. The Board suggested a robust visual description in respect of this topic in the EIAR to accompany the planning application.

In response to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that the exact output capacity of the proposed wind farm will emerge between Design Iterations 2 and 3. The prospective applicant said that megawatt capacity of the proposed turbines could potentially change and that it would advise on this

accordingly. The Board also recommended that a layout of other proposed and approved wind energy developments in the area be produced with regard to the matter of cumulative impact assessment.

**Conclusion:**

The record of the instant meeting will issue shortly and it will then be open to the prospective applicant to request a further meeting or formal closure of the pre-application consultation process. The prospective applicant indicated that it would likely seek a further meeting and that this could be accommodated in early 2022.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 p.m.

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**Ciara Kellett**

**Assistant Director of Planning**