

**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Record of Meeting ABP-311299-21 2nd meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-311299-21 Construction of up to 9 wind turbines and associated works at Gortloughra, Kealkill, Bantry, Co. Cork.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	2 nd		
Date	24/05/22	Start Time	11 a.m.
Location	N/A	End Time	11.45 a.m.

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

The Board referred to its previous meeting with the prospective applicant and asked if the prospective applicant had any comments it wished to make on the record of this meeting. The prospective applicant replied that it had no comments to make.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant began by recapping on the nature and extent of the proposed development which includes 9 wind turbines (6 MW each), the construction of an on-site 110kV substation and grid connection and associated works. The prospective applicant added that the proposed development will be located approximately 9.7 kilometres north-west of Dunmanway and 16 kilometres approximately from Bantry.

The prospective applicant recapped on the subject site and the constraints which pertain with respect to structures such as monuments and residential dwellings. The prospective applicant said that the subject site is mostly wet heath and bogland and noted various habitats in the location.

The prospective applicant provided the Board's representatives with details apropos the layout of the proposed development and the grid connection route options which are being considered (options A, B, C and D). The prospective applicant said that a firm route has not yet been established and that constraints in terms of land ownership and existing infrastructure have to be considered. The route options for delivery of turbines to the subject site were also presented. Two options are being considered in this respect from Cork Port and the prospective applicant said that it is awaiting topographical surveys in this respect.

With respect to the matter of community engagement, the prospective applicant said that this is an on-going process and that a community liaison officer has been appointed; further consultations are also planned in this regard. There is also a project website and two webinars have been held as well as a face-to-face event; one more of these is planned as well as a further webinar.

With regard to the wind energy strategy which pertains, the prospective applicant referred to the Cork County Development Plan 2014-2020 and noted that the subject site is designated as 'Open to Consideration'. The prospective applicant referred in particular to ED 3-5 in this regard and noted that the draft county development plan is due to come into effect in June 2022 with the area in question still designated as 'Open to Consideration'.

With respect to the matter of scoping, the prospective applicant noted that scoping has been undertaken with relevant stakeholders; key consultees include the relevant local authority, the DAU, IFI and the Irish Aviation Authority.

In relation to survey work, the prospective applicant noted that survey work has taken place in respect of habitats, protected species, aquatic species and bat activity. Surveys in respect of ornithology are on-going with regard to Vantage Point Surveys and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken at 29 locations. There has also been extensive survey work to date with regard to archaeology and cultural heritage, hydrology, geology and hydrogeology and baseline noise monitoring.

With regard to the matter of EIA, the prospective applicant said that this would cover topics such as biodiversity, noise, shadow flicker and traffic and transport.

With respect to designated sites, the prospective applicant said that the closest European Sites are the Bandon River SAC and the Derryclogher (Knockboy) Bog SAC, which is also a proposed NHA; the closest SPA is the Mullaghanish to Musheramore SPA. The prospective applicant noted that the project sites are located within a freshwater pearl mussel sensitive catchment as the Owvane and Bandon Rivers are known to support pearl mussels. With regard to the matter of surface water, the prospective applicant noted that the subject site is divided by three catchment areas.

In relation to the matter of peat stability, the prospective applicant advised that there is no history of landslide events on the subject site. The prospective applicant added that peat is generally relatively thin across the site with only some isolated pockets of deeper peat; it said that peat stability is not considered high risk generally. The prospective applicant also advised that peat probes have been conducted.

With respect to noise, the prospective applicant said that there are 23 receptors within two kilometres of the proposed turbines; a set-back distance of a minimum 700 metres has been maintained between residential dwellings and proposed turbine positions.

With regard to archaeology and cultural heritage, the prospective applicant reported that there are 23 existing recorded archaeological monuments located within the site boundary; it added that none of these are national monuments and there are none within five kilometres of the proposed development. The prospective applicant noted the local authority's consideration that the area in question is an Archaeological Landscape. With regard to pedestrian access, the prospective applicant said that it would be fully supportive of facilitating continued access for hillwalkers and has discussed this with the local authority.

In relation to landscape and visual amenity, the prospective applicant said that the proposed development is located mostly in Area 15 landscape character area in the current county development plan (Ridged and Peaked Upland). The eastern most turbine would be located in an area designated Rolling Marginal and Forested Middleground. The prospective applicant also noted the Scenic Route Road to Kealkill via Cousane Gap to Togher to the south of the subject site along the R585.

The prospective applicant provided the Board's representatives with some examples of intended viewpoints for the purposes of EIA (VP2, VP8, VP18 and VP21). The prospective applicant said that photomontages would be produced in respect of all viewpoint locations.

With respect to next steps in the project timeline, the prospective applicant advised of its current intention to lodge the subsequent planning application circa Quarter 3 2022. The prospective applicant restated its opinion that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure development with respect to its main elements and noted, in particular, that it would exceed 50 megawatts in terms of proposed output.

Board's comments/queries:

The Board's representatives advised that a continuous ornithological survey should be conducted as it noted that the issue of bird surveys has caused some delays and difficulties on other planning applications; the Board emphasised that all such data should be up-to-date. The prospective applicant said that it would do so and said that it has not received any feedback from the DAU as of yet; it also said that it had issued relevant information to Birdwatch Ireland. The Board's representatives advised that these bodies should be engaged with as far as possible. The prospective applicant noted this point and also noted on-going difficulties in terms of substantive consultations with the DAU and NPWS.

The Board noted the habitats on the site and advised that there should be clarity as to whether any habitat falls under Annex I.

The Board also recommended that the grid connection route might be finalised by the time the planning application is formally lodged. The Board said that if any other route options emerge, it should be made aware of this as part of the pre-application consultation process.

The Board enquired as to whether there was any update on the planning status of tracks traversing the subject site. The prospective applicant said that it is following up on this matter but does not anticipate any difficulties.

With regard to the proposed community fund, the prospective applicant said that there would be a direct payment to nearby residents; it also said that a community representative in respect of community groups would likely be appointed and would administer payments of the proposed community fund. The administration of the fund is also likely to target sectoral interest groups such as hill walking organisations from a wider area.


The prospective applicant also indicated that an area of land will be set aside and subject to habitat management for red grouse.

The prospective applicant also advised that the development of a walking route and provision of interpretative signage has been discussed with the local authority.

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 meeting concluded at 11.45 a.m.

 26/5/22

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning