



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-312193-21 1st meeting

Description	ABP-312193-21 – Proposed development consisting of a 12-turbine windfarm, located on a 140-hectare site, Ballycar, Co. Clare		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation.		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Venue	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Date	23/02/2022	Time	11:00am – 12:05pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Paul Caprani, Senior Planning Inspector		
Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer	s.caulfield@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
Representing the Prospective Applicant		
David McDonnell – Ballycar Green Energy (Applicant)		
John O'Connor – Ballycar Green Energy (Applicant)		
Peter Barry – MWP (Agent)		
Ken Fitzgerald – MWP (Agent)		

Introduction:

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 14th December 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 began the presentation by providing a company overview and background. Ballycar Green Energy Limited is a renewable energy company based in Co. Limerick with 20 years' experience in the wind energy industry and several operational assets across Ireland. The proposed development aims to provide clean energy for 30,000 households in Ballycar and the wider community.

The proposed site is located in the townland of Ballycar, which is north of Limerick City and northwest of the existing Ardnacrusha Power Station. The proposed development consists of 12 turbines, with an overall output in the region of 54-60MW. The site is zoned as strategic and acceptable in principle within the current Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023, and the same zoning applies within the Draft Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029. It was submitted that the current design includes 11 turbines with a tip height of 156 metres and 1 turbine with a tip height of 150 metres.

The prospective applicant said they are currently assessing two grid connection options, one being a tail-fed connection into the Ardnacrusha 110kV substation and the other, a connection into an existing 110kV overhead line in the vicinity. The potential connection at Ardnacrusha 110kV substation may occur along the existing road network or over third-party lands into the site (this has not yet been decided). The second option is to connect into one of two existing 110kV overhead lines, one which traverses from Ardnacrusha to Drumline and the other from Ardnacrusha to Ennis.

Regarding surveys, it was submitted that 24 months of bird surveys have been completed and work is continuing for another winter period. There are 12 months of bat surveys completed and the majority of the baseline environmental studies have also been completed.

The prospective applicant said they are currently engaged with the Irish Aviation Authority and various telecoms providers in the area to ensure no impact on services.

It was submitted that the turbine and construction haul routes are currently being assessed, along with potential land takes.

The prospective applicant said there will be a requirement for some felling in order to facilitate access to turbines but that this will be compensated by the re-planting of lands. These lands have been identified and will be fully assessed as part of the EIAR.

The community benefits were highlighted including the direct/indirect job creation and educational/environmental benefits to the local community.

Regarding community engagement, it was submitted that consultations commenced in November 2021. This included the creation of a project specific website, leaflet drop in the local area, engagement with local representatives and face-to-face meetings with residents. These efforts are anticipated to continue, and the feedback gained will be incorporated into the development.

The prospective applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development falls within the scope of class 1 of the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006, being a wind farm with an output greater than 50MW.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- It was noted that one of the Board's representatives recently visited the site, which provided an understanding of the baseline environment of the land.
- The Board's representatives said engagement with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is of importance given the sensitivities in the area and in relation to bird corridors and collision risks. The prospective applicant said the DAU had been consulted and they provided a detailed response covering areas such as archaeology, ecology, and biodiversity. A meeting has not been sought at this time.

- The Board's representatives noted a geological site located in the area and said this will need to be assessed. All national monuments located within the study area will also need to be fully assessed.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to be cognisant of matters such as cumulative impacts and in-combination effects with any existing or proposed wind farms in the surrounding area.
- The Board's representatives advised engagement with Shannon Airport given its proximity to the site.
- In relation to peat slippage, the Board's representatives advised providing a robust peat stability assessment for the development.
- The Board's representatives advised providing high quality detailed mapping of environmental receptors such as shadow flicker, noise, and visual receptors.
- The Board's representatives said a detailed map of the SAC's and SPA's in the surrounding area would be useful in order to assess the qualifying interests and bird migration paths.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said a stage 2 appropriate assessment is anticipated given the potential hydrological links to the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165).
- The Board's representatives said both grid connection options can be included in the application, but these options must be individually assessed in each chapter of the EIAR.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to include details in relation to major accidents as part of the EIAR, particularly in relation to peat stability.
- It was advised by the Board's representatives to include a carbon calculation in relation to any peat removal on the site.
- The prospective applicant said with respect to the felling of forestry the re-plant lands are not located in the area.
- A general discussion was had around the Derryadd Judgement. The Board's representatives advised that if a specific turbine type or tip height is not finalised and options/ranges are brought forward, these options/range should be considered in the EIAR to allow the Board to examine and fully evaluate the likely impacts.

- In response to a query on the matter, the Board's representatives advised reviewing the draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2019) alongside the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) concerning noise, and made reference to the Balz Judgement.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant that any proposed upgrades to the local roads (i.e., widening, strengthening, hedgerow removal etc.) should be fully assessed in the EIAR.
- The Board's representatives stated their preliminary opinion is that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure development but noted that it is ultimately a decision for the Board.

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.



Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning