



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-313001-22 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-313001-22 110 kV substation and underground grid connection at Ballyroe Townland, Charleville, Co. Cork.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	03/05/22	Start Time	11 a.m.
Location	N/A	End Time	12.10 p.m.

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Staff Members
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Karla McBride, Senior Planning Inspector
Maire Daly, Planning Inspector
Kieran Somers, Executive Officer
Representing the Prospective Applicant
Kieran Tarpey, Entrust Services
PJ McCarthy, Soleire Renewables
Marcus Price, Soleire Renewables
Austin Folan, Entrust Services
Paul McShane, Hydrologist

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 began by providing the Board's representatives with a background in relation to its projects (which include consented developments and projects awaiting planning approval).

With regard to the instant project, the prospective applicant said that the proposed substation is located in the townland of Ballyroe, south of Charleville and west of the N20 Road. The prospective applicant said that the proposed underground grid connection would travel along the same route as the previously consented 38kV grid connection which formed part of the consented Ballyroe Solar Farm (register reference number 20/04041); this is to pass through a number of townlands, including Ballyroe and Ballyheha.

With respect to the constituent elements of the proposed development, the prospective applicant said the area for the subject site is circa 1.25 hectares and involves a tail-fed 110kV substation which would include two-storey buildings and ancillary plant; the prospective applicant added that the subject site is currently being used for farm purposes. It noted archaeological features in the vicinity of the subject site and the proximity of the River Blackwater SAC.

With respect to the underground grid connection component of the proposed development, the prospective applicant explained that this will involve a circa 4.4-kilometre 110kV single circuit underground connection, a communications duct to accommodate fibre cable, joint bays and, separately, a 33kV grid interconnector from the consented Fiddane solar farm to the proposed substation (to be submitted as a Section 5 to the relevant local authority).

The prospective applicant said the initial design of the proposed substation and grid route are now complete, as well as a number of the draft environmental reports. The prospective applicant said the environmental reports will include topics such as geology, ecology, landscaping, transport and noise.

In relation to the main environmental considerations which are pertinent, the prospective applicant elaborated as follows:

- Geology – the prospective applicant referred to near surface material (glacial clays, sands and gravels) and groundwater. The prospective applicant added that there would be no significant impacts on land, soil and geology.
- Archaeology – the prospective applicant advised that surveys previously carried out for the consented solar farm (Ballyroe) will be utilised, as well as new surveys in relation to the cable from the substation; the prospective applicant added that no significant impacts are predicted.
- Ecology – the prospective applicant advised that draft reports (including an NIS) are being prepared currently. The prospective applicant said that the main ecological consideration is the River Blackwater SAC which is located approximately 40 metres south of the proposed substation. The prospective applicant said that two potential impacts have been identified: the necessity for HCVs to reverse down an existing track following deliveries and the discharge into the existing drainage network.
- Hydrology – the prospective applicant identified the most immediate and significant hydrological features which flow into the River Blackwater SAC. The prospective applicant said that it proposes to maintain a 15-metre wide buffer zone from all drainage ditches and that secondary measures will also be taken during the construction stage of the proposed development. With regard to the construction works compound, the prospective applicant elaborated on the constituent features for this and said that it would utilise a simple drainage system. A silt trap manhole and wheel wash system will also be provided.

With regard to section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the prospective applicant stated its opinion that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure.

With regard to the matter of EIA, the prospective applicant said that its opinion is that an EIAR would not be required as part of the planning application and that a number of specialist environmental reports will inform the planning application.

Finally, with regard to next steps in the process, the prospective applicant said that survey work will continue and that consultations with relevant bodies and stakeholders will also continue.

Board's queries/comments:

The Board's representatives stated their preliminary opinion that the proposed development would be SID but that it is ultimately up to the Board to make the decision.

The Board's representatives noted the distance between the boundary of the proposed substation and the SAC and the buffer to be employed here. With regard to ecology generally, the Board noted the presence of freshwater pearl mussel and the need to protect this.

The Board asked how long quarrying activities on the site have been operating. The prospective applicant said that this has been going on for a number of years (circa 1980s) and has been the subject of two planning permissions. With respect to the River Awbeg, the Board noted that this supports a number of Qualifying Interest species for the SAC, such as Whitetailed crayfish, and that three species of Lamprey, Otter had been recorded in the vicinity; the downstream River Blackwater is a salmonoid river that also supports Freshwater pearl mussel, and that the subject sites lies within a designated Freshwater pearl mussel catchment; and advised the prospective applicant to be cognisant of ecological matters with regard to the chosen location of the proposed substation. The Board also advised the prospective applicant to liaise with the NPWS with respect to this. The prospective applicant

noted the presence of existing farm buildings further north of the proposed site constraining possible locations for the substation. The prospective applicant also stated that it has certain archaeological constraints with respect to the presence of a Bronze Age settlement and recorded monuments.

The Board noted that the prospective applicant intends to submit a NIS and said that it would be important for the planning application to demonstrate its rationale for the location for the proposed substation with regard to ecological sensitivities which are present (including the River Blackwater SAC).

The prospective applicant said that it has engaged with the National Monuments Service and is awaiting further feedback in that regard; it also advised that its ecologist has engaged with the NPWS. The prospective applicant said that it believed a net benefit for the biodiversity of the area would arise from the proposed development with the removal of some intensive agricultural and quarrying activities.

With respect to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that it has done hydrological modelling and that a detailed flood analysis would accompany the planning application; it added that the proposed substation would be located outside any flood risk zone. The prospective applicant also advised that it has engaged with the relevant local authority and hopes to engage further in this regard.

In response to the prospective applicant's query, the Board confirmed that an EIAR would not be mandatory for this type of development. With respect to AA/ecology, the Board advised that the NIS to accompany the planning application should be as robust as possible.

The Board outlined the next steps in the process if the prospective applicant decides to close the pre-application consultation process following receipt of the record of this meeting. The Board also set out the timelines with respect to any subsequent planning application, including the time period for members of the public and prescribed bodies to make submissions/observations.

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 Board said that it could facilitate a further meeting if so required.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 p.m.

 Ciara Kellett 6/5/22

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning

