



**An  
Bord  
Pleanála**

## **Record of Meeting ABP-313351-22 1<sup>st</sup> meeting**

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	Wind Farm Development of approximately 9 wind turbines and all associated works. Umma More and adjacent townlands, Co. Westmeath		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1st / 2nd / 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	21/06/22	<b>Start Time</b>	11.00 a.m.
<b>Location</b>	N/A	<b>End Time</b>	12.25 a.m.

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Paul Caprani, Senior Planning Inspector
Niamh Thornton, Executive Officer
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>
Meabhann Crowe, MKO
Ellen Costello, MKO
William O'Connor, prospective applicant
Niall Galvin, prospective applicant

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. It was noted that two separate pre-application consultation requests have been submitted by the prospective applicant, pursuant to section 182E (ABP-313352-22) and section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended (subject case). Both cases will be discussed at the instant meeting back-to-back with two separate records prepared for each file. The presentation by the applicant covers both cases.

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 gave a presentation on the proposed Umma More Renewable Energy Development which includes a windfarm development of 9 turbines with a total generating capacity of 40MW-60MW, and a new 110kV substation and grid connection to the existing Thornsberry 110kV substation in County Offaly.

Umma More Limited is an associated company of Enerco Energy Ltd., an Irish-owned company with extensive experience in the design, construction and operation of wind energy developments throughout Ireland.

The proposed wind farm will be located in Westmeath, approximately 12km northeast of Athlone. The site is a mix of agricultural and forestry land. The prospective applicant stated that there are few ecological constraints and no European or heritage sites within the proposed development.

The windfarm is proposed to connect to the National Grid at 110kV Thornsberry substation in County Offaly by way of underground cabling which will run primarily within the public road corridor.

The prospective applicant stated that the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 is encouraging of wind energy developments. The proposed site is classified as having 'Low Capacity' for wind energy development within the Westmeath Wind Energy Development map.

A sit constraints map was presented showing 50m buffer zones from watercourses and archaeological features, telecom buffer zones and 740m buffer zones from dwellings.

A map showing proposed turbine locations and new roads was presented.

Regarding the Grid connection, two options are under consideration for connection into Thornsberry substation.

A scoping document was prepared and circulated to prescribed bodies in August 2021 with an update circulated in February, 2022. A number of replies have been received including from GSI, Fáilte Ireland, DAU and Telecoms operators.

The prospective applicant had a consultation meeting with Westmeath County Council on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2022. A number of issues were discussed including setbacks, technology, access roads and policy 10.146 of the Westmeath County Development Plan.

Consultation has been sought with Offaly County Council but no meeting has taken place to date.

A Community Liaison Officer has been appointed by the prospective applicant. Public consultation is ongoing since April, 2021.

The proposed structure of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report was presented and an update provided on works completed to date. Bird surveys and bat surveys have been completed, geological and hydrological surveys completed and Archaeological/Heritage, visual impact assessments and Traffic and Haulage Route surveys are ongoing.

Photomontage Viewpoints have been selected. Three viewpoints were presented – viewpoints 9, 14 and 28.

### **Discussion:**

The Board's representatives directed the prospective applicant to the Bracklyn Windfarm Development as an example of a similar development in County Westmeath. It was noted that the Council recommended refusal of this development based on policy 10.146 of the Westmeath County Development Plan

The Board's representatives noted an area of forestry to the South West of the site and stated that any removal of trees should be addressed in the EIAR.

It was noted that there appears to be low species sensitivity in the area and the site is not close to any SAC or SPA. Any hydrological links/impacts should be assessed by the prospective applicant. It was advised that any migration paths between SPAs be taken into consideration in studies.

The existence of a number of recorded monuments and an active quarry was noted. It was advised that the quarry to the north east of the site should be included in the cumulative impacts in relation to noise etc. It was stated that the cumulative impact assessment of windfarms should be very robust. Yellow River Windfarm was given

as another example of windfarm developments which should be addressed in the cumulative impacts. The prospective applicant was advised to consider other windfarm projects at various stages of development in the wider area including the Bracklyn Windfarm.

It was stated that clarity should be sought on the existence of an airstrip 2km away from Ballymore.

The Water Framework Directive, high vulnerability aquifers in the area, Hill of Uisneach as a high sensitivity location and existence of walking trails as sensitive receptors were discussed.

Proximity to the M6 was noted as being advantageous in relation to haulage routes. The Board's representatives stated that any road improvements required must be included in the application and a full assessment provided.

The Board's representatives stated that the prospective applicant should have regard to the 2019 Guidelines especially in relation to shadow flicker and noise.

Regarding the total output of the proposed windfarm it was clarified that the output is very likely to be greater than 50MW. The Board's representatives stated that the legislation is clear regarding the SID threshold at 50MW. The prospective applicant must demonstrate that the turbine output exceeds 50MW for the development to be considered SID.

Regarding turbine design the Board's representatives clarified that particulars of all possible turbine sizes must be included in the application; providing a range or 'worst case scenario' will not suffice. It was stated that the Board need to be able to assess all possible types of turbines and that the EIAR should be laid out clearly to demonstrate assessment of all possible options.

It was clarified that one EIAR will be prepared to cover both applications, the windfarm and the grid connection. This was noted as a suitable approach by the Board who advised that the applicant be very clear in the documentation as to what elements of the project are being sought under what sections of the legislation. This may require the EIAR to be laid out slightly differently for each application to ensure clarity for the Inspector and the Board who will be assessing it (should the Board determine that the project is SID).

A brief discussion was had regarding the dual application approach versus submitting the entire project as one application under section 37E of the Act. The Board's representatives noted that both approaches have been considered by other applicants recently but that the majority of applications are separate.

The prospective applicant stated that it does envisage a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment will be required.

It was noted that the zone of theoretical visibility stretches as far as Roscommon and Longford. The prospective applicant stated that it had scoped the project with Roscommon County Council but not Longford County Council after consideration.

The prospective applicant expects to be ready to lodge the application in August, 2022.

The Board's representatives gave the preliminary view that the proposed development does constitute SID but the final decision is for the Board to make.

It was agreed that the prospective applicant should clarify in writing to the Board that the generating capacity of the Windfarm will be greater than 50MW.

**Conclusion:**

The record of the instant meeting will issue in due course and the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of any further meeting. The onus is on the prospective applicant to either request a further meeting or formal closure of the instant pre-application consultation process.

The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.



**Ciara Kellett**

**Assistant Director of Planning**