



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-313352-22 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	110kV substation and grid connection cabling to the existing Thornsberry 110kV substation in County Westmeath and County Offaly		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	21/06/22	Start Time	11.00 a.m.
Location	N/A	End Time	12.25 a.m.

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Paul Caprani, Senior Planning Inspector
Niamh Thornton, Executive Officer
Representing the Prospective Applicant
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 (subject case) and section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended (ABP-313351-22). 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, Failte Ireland, DAU and Telecoms operators.

The prospective applicant had a consultation meeting with Westmeath County Council on 16th 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 queried the rationale to connect to the National Grid at the Thornsberry substation, requiring a long grid connection to be developed. It was clarified that, following discussions with Eirgrid, Thornsberry substation was the most viable connection. This selection will be covered in the alternatives section of the EIAR.

The prospective applicant clarified that any development on private lands will be done by way of agreement.

It was clarified that the development will make use of an existing pedestrian underpass to cross the M6. Details will be provided in the application.

The prospective applicant stated that the underground cabling will be ~1.2m deep and that end masts will not be required.

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.

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

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.

 27/6/22

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning