

**An  
Bord  
Pleanála**

**Record of Meeting  
ABP-313680-22 1<sup>st</sup>  
meeting**

<b>Description</b>	ABP-313680-22 - Development of a 110kV substation and grid connection serving a proposed solar PV farm at Blackwater Bog, near Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application Consultation.		
<b>1st / 2nd / 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting		
<b>Venue</b>	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
<b>Date</b>	04/08/2022	<b>Time</b>	11:00am-11:45am

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>		
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Una Crosse, Senior Planning Inspector		
Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer	s.caulfield@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>		
Ann Marie Doherty - Bord na Móna		
Sean Creedon - Bord na Móna		
Caitriona Carter - Bord na Móna		
Sinead Ryan – MWP		
Eoin O'Connor – MWP		
Michael Butler – ESB Networks		

## **Introduction:**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022, 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 its presentation by providing a brief introduction to the project team. It said the proposed development consists of a joint venture (JV) between Bord Na Móna and ESB networks. It was submitted that the first development arising from this JV was the development of the Timahoe North 70 MW solar farm in Co. Kildare which was granted permission by An Bord Pleanála in July 2020. Similarly, to the proposed development, a planning application for the Timahoe North solar farm was submitted to Kildare County Council, with the application for the grid connection and substation submitted to An Bord Pleanála.

The proposed development consists of a 110kV substation and grid connection to serve a proposed solar PV farm at Blackwater Bog, near Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly. A planning application is expected to be lodged with Offaly County Council for the solar farm development and the purpose of this meeting with the Board is to progress pre-application consultations for the substation and grid connection element.

The prospective applicant said the site is located at Blackwater Bog, between Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise in west Co. Offaly. It was noted that peat extraction activities ceased at the site in 2019.

The prospective applicant said the area was identified as a suitable location for solar development given its grid access to Shannonbridge power station, the remote nature of the bog and distance from residential dwellings, absence of Natura 2000 sites in the study area, general topography and the supporting infrastructure on the site.

It was submitted that the proposed development would have the potential to power approximately 100,000 households and save approximately 90,000 tonnes of Co2 emissions per annum.

The prospective applicant said baseline environmental assessments are nearing completion and the design layout options are being considered based on results of the constraints analysis and baseline studies.

The prospective applicant submitted that EIA screening has been completed and it is considering the preparation of an EIAR for the entire project. The prospective applicant said AA screening has also been completed and said an NIS would be submitted with the planning application.

It is the prospective applicant's current intention to submit a planning application for the proposed development in December 2022.

The prospective applicant said stakeholder engagement is ongoing. A meeting was held with the National Parks and Wildlife Service with the species of interest identified; further engagement is anticipated. The prospective applicant said it hopes to arrange a pre-application meeting with Offaly County Council in September 2022.

The prospective applicant said public consultation events were held in March 2021, an information leaflet was circulated, and door-to-door meetings were held with residents in the local area. It was noted that a community liaison officer has been appointed and a dedicated website ([www.blackwatersolarfarm.ie](http://www.blackwatersolarfarm.ie)) is in operation.

The prospective applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development qualifies as electricity transmission development and therefore falls within the scope of SID under Section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

## **Discussion**

The following matters were discussed:

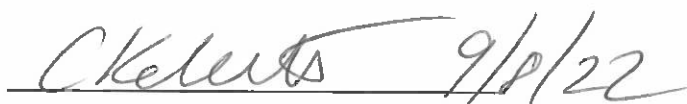
- A general discussion was had with respect to the requirement for EIAR in relation to solar developments and the project classes in the Fifth Schedule relating to electricity developments. The prospective applicant said internal discussions are ongoing in this respect. The preparation of environmental reports in lieu of an EIAR was discussed. The prospective applicant said it expects to request a second meeting in the coming months and further details can be provided at that time.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said options are currently being assessed however, it is likely to connect into the Shannonbridge 220/110 kV substation via an underground cable from the subject site. The prospective applicant said the grid route would cross the public road and travel

along lands owned by Bord Na Móna, before connecting into the Shannonbridge substation.

- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said there is an existing EPA license on the site (Historical and for peat extraction) and it said details of all licenses will be provided to the Board in the second meeting.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to robustly consider archaeology and cultural heritage, given the proximity to Clonmacnoise.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of biodiversity and habitats given its proximity to the River Shannon.

## 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.

 9/8/22

**Ciara Kellett**

**Assistant Director of Planning**