



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-313680-22 – 3rd Meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-313680-22 - Development of a 110kV substation and grid connection serving a proposed solar PV farm at Blackwater Bog, near Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	3 rd Meeting		
Venue	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Date	02/06/2023	Time	11:00am – 11:30am

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Paul Caprani, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)

Máire Daly, Senior Planning Inspector

Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer

Evan McGuigan, Administrative Assistant

Representing the Prospective Applicant

Ann Marie Doherty – Bord na Móna

Sean Creedon – Bord na Móna

Conor Sheridan – Bord na Móna

Andrew Morrow – ESB Networks

Sinead Ryan – MWP

Shane Howard – MWP

Introduction

The Board's representatives referred to its previous meeting with the prospective applicant on 22nd September 2022 and the record of this meeting. The Board's representatives asked if the prospective applicant had any comments it wished to make on the record of this meeting or questions; the prospective applicant replied that it did not.

Presentation by the prospective applicant

The prospective applicant provided a summary of their interactions to date with the Board and of the main items previously discussed. These included the need for an EIAR and the proposed planning pathways.

It was confirmed by the prospective applicant that an EIAR will be required as part of the proposed planning application for the solar farm at Blackwater Bog, to be submitted to Offaly County Council. This requirement was triggered due to the expectation that the thresholds for forestry felling (greater than 10 hectares of natural woodland) and the construction of new internal roads (greater than 2 kilometres) in this development would be exceeded. Therefore, the prospective applicant confirmed that the EIAR would include the substation and grid connection as key components of the overall solar development, to eliminate the risk of project splitting.

It was confirmed by the prospective applicant that engagement had taken place with EirGrid regarding the design of the substation and grid connection. These discussions resulted in an agreement that the proposed substation would be tail-fed, in line with EirGrid 110kv station design standards for AIS stations. The prospective applicant stated that it was EirGrid's view that the substation would not form a node on the transmission network. As a result, the prospective applicant now considers that the substation and grid connection development does not constitute SID, and that the planning consent for the entire solar development can be sought through a single application directly to Offaly County Council.

The prospective applicant said that the project was now at an advanced stage, with environmental studies (including bird surveys), impact assessments and final designs nearing completion. A proposed site layout was submitted by the

prospective applicant, indicating where the solar farm would be located. This layout was confirmed to be the prospective applicants preferred option and was developed following the undertaking of a constraints analysis and EIA work that identified the area most suitable location for solar panels.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- The prospective applicant confirmed that they had not yet submitted a planning application to Offaly County Council, following a query on the matter.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant of previous pre-application cases involving tail-fed 110kv substations that were determined to be SID cases. They did not give a preliminary view on whether this case would constitute a SID or not and stated that it would be ultimately up to the Board to decide.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant confirmed that they intended to use an underground cable for this development. It would be located through the western expanse of the bog and connect at the southern side of the Shannonbridge substation.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to highlight the importance as to why the EIAR is required for this development, referring to the issues of forestry felling and internal roads.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to take archaeology and cultural heritage issues into consideration given the proximity of the development to Clonmacnoise Monastery.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant provided an update on EPA licences in the area. The peat licence (under IE Licence P0502) was confirmed to be still valid, and required maintenance continues to be carried out. The prospective applicant stated that clarification was being sought regarding the boundary of the industrial emissions licence (under IE Licence P0611), and that it was still engaging with the EPA regarding both licences.

- Following a question from the prospective applicant, the Board's representatives confirmed that the prospective applicant could submit a letter to the Board from Eirgrid expressing an opinion that the development did not constitute SID.
- The prospective applicant stated their belief that a fourth meeting would not be required, and their expectation is to submit a planning application before the end of 2023.

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.



Paul Caprani

Assistant Director of Planning