

An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-313778-22 1st meeting

Description	ABP-313778-22 - Proposed 11 turbine wind farm at Cush, Galros West, Galros East, Boolinarig Big, Ballycolin and Eglis, Co. Offaly		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation.		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Venue	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Date	05/08/2022	Time	11:00am – 11:58am

Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Una Crosse, Senior Planning Inspector		
Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer	s.caulfield@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
Representing the Prospective Applicant		
Gavin Daly, Planning Manager, Galetech Energy Services		
Declan Owens, Executive Planner, Galetech Energy Services		
Steven Drury, Project Manager, Cush Wind Limited		

Introduction:

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 13th June 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 proposed development consists of 11 wind turbines and is located in west Co. Offaly, approximately 4 kilometres north of Birr and 28 kilometres west of Tullamore.

The subject site is low-lying and relatively flat in nature which comprises cutover peat bog, forestry plantations and pastoral farmland. The prospective applicant said the area is sparsely populated and can generally be characterised by one-off rural dwellings regularly accompanied by agricultural buildings. The site is located in close proximity to two redundant quarries to the south of the site and one operational quarry to the southeast (Loughnane Concrete).

The prospective applicant noted that the site is bisected by the N62 National Road, and it is their current intention to create two new construction phase access points onto the N62; one to be used to access the eastern side of the site and the second to access the western side. Upon completion, the construction phase access points would be closed, and two new operational phase access points are proposed; one via a local road to the southwest of the site and the other via a local road to the east of the site.

The prospective applicant said the lands are identified as 'Areas open for consideration for Wind Energy Development' within the current Offaly County Council Development Plan 2021-2027. It was noted that there are 2 European designated sites located within 2 kilometres of the proposed development; Dovegrove Callows Special Protection Area (Site Code: 004137), and Ridge Road, SW of Rapemills Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 000919). The qualifying interest for the Dovegrove Callows SPA is the Greenland white-fronted goose and for Ridge Road, SW of Rapemills SAC, the semi-natural dry grassland habitat. A map was presented which highlighted all European designated sites located in the wider region. It was submitted that there are 21 Natura 2000 sites located within 20 kilometres of the windfarm site. The prospective applicant said there is the potential for direct hydrological connection to 7 Natura 2000 sites.

The prospective applicant said it is proposed to submit a Natura Impact Statement as part of the planning application.

The prospective applicant said a setback distance of 4-times tip height from residential dwellings can be achieved, in line with the recommendations of the Draft Revised Wind Energy Guidelines 2019.

The prospective applicant said the development consists of 11 wind turbines, based on an overall height of 200 metres. The indicative output capacity is approximately 79.2 MW (7.2 MW per turbine).

It was noted that the grid connection would be via an underground cable, to be placed within the carriageway of local and regional roads. The prospective applicant said the grid connection would not form part of this planning application however, it said all options would be fully assessed within the EIAR and NIS.

The prospective applicant presented a map which highlighted the proposed turbine locations, soil deposition areas, borrow pit location and access points.

In relation to the turbine delivery route, the prospective applicant said it would commence at the Port of Galway and follow along the N6, M6, N52 and N62 before arriving onto the site.

The prospective applicant noted that environmental scoping and constraints analysis is ongoing and includes the identification of constraints at both a macro and site-specific level.

It was noted by the prospective applicant that over 2 years of bird surveys have been completed to date, bat surveys have recently been conducted and habitat, aquatic and targeted mammals' surveys are ongoing on the site.

The prospective applicant said the proposed development is located approximately 5 kilometres from Irelands I-LOFAR station which is located in the grounds of Birr Castle. The Low Frequency Array (LOFAR) is an international network of state-of-the-art telescopes used to observe the Universe in unprecedented detail at low radio frequencies. It was noted by the prospective applicant that a specialist consultant has been engaged to conduct a radio telescope impact assessment in order to ascertain the potential for likely effects on this station. The scoping report was furnished to I-LOFAR and they are awaiting feedback.

The prospective applicant said the proposed site is located in the vicinity of a flood plain. It said a stage 3 site specific flood risk assessment, including flood modelling has been carried out. This included detailed site topographic surveys, use of lidar data and flood modelling of the Rapemills River and flood plain. A map presented the site-specific modelling of the 100 year and 1,000-year flooding zones which showed all turbines located outside of these flood zones.

It was submitted that there are 6 recorded monuments within 1 kilometre of the proposed windfarm. The prospective applicant said there are no zones of archaeological potential within the proposed development site however, there is one zone within 5 kilometres, that being Birr town including Birr Castle. The prospective applicant said there are approximately 365 protected structures within 5 kilometres of the site with the majority of these located around the town of Birr.

The prospective applicant highlighted the presence of Clonmacnoise in the wider area and said although it sits outside the 20-kilometre study area, it will be assessed in both the landscape and cultural heritage chapters of the EIAR, and this will be aided by photomontage imagery.

The prospective applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development would qualify as SID as the threshold of 50 MW is exceeded.

With regard to public consultation, the prospective applicant said consultation is ongoing and includes remote consultation, door-to-door consultation, dedicated consultation clinics and updates added to the project website (www.cushwindfarm.ie).

It is the prospective applicant's current intention to lodge the planning application in April 2023.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said a number of bird surveys have been completed including specific surveys on associated special conservation interests. The Board's representatives advised the


- prospective applicant to examine all historical and existing data from previous applications in the wider area which may be useful in understanding the existing environment in conjunction with data gathered from their own surveys.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that there is a direct hydrological connection to 7 Natura 2000 sites, towards the River Shannon. The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to carefully consider the most appropriate mitigation measures for the relevant qualifying interests and special conservation interests and to ensure the protection of water quality in the area.
 - In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said small sections of forestry felling would be required, primarily in areas adjacent to T2 and T4 turbines. Reference was made to replant lands which may be required and to the absence of a role for the Board in the consideration of same.
 - The prospective applicant said preliminary consultations were held with the Roads Department of Offaly County Council and additional information will be furnished to them in due course.
 - The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide a comprehensive list of photomontages from viewpoints representative of communities within the area and within and around Birr Castle, both from ground and elevated vantage points.
 - In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said there is currently no proposal to include recreational amenities such as walkways or trails within the site but said the design is subject to minor changes and it is something they will consider moving forward.
 - The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of telecommunication routes which traverse the wider area within which the site is located.
 - In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said no consultation has taken place with the National Parks & Wildlife Service to date,

but it is their intention to request a meeting prior to submitting the application. Additionally, the prospective applicant noted that no communication has been received from Offaly County Council to-date, but they hope to engage with them in the coming months.

- The Board's representatives advised including an analysis of the carbon losses and gains of the proposed development within the climate chapter of the EIAR.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant confirmed that the grid connection will not form part of this planning application. It was submitted that they are currently assessing all options and it is not yet known whether the grid connection application will be lodged under section 182 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

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.

 12/8/22

Ciara Kellett

Assistant Director of Planning

