

An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting

### ABP-313780-22 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

<b>Description</b>	ABP-313780-22 – Proposed Windfarm development comprising between 13 and 18 wind turbines, in the townlands of Glashare, Coolnacrutta, Ballylehaun, Gorteennamuck, Ballygowney, Ballyring Upper, Ballyring Lower and Tentore, Co. Kilkenny		
<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>	17/08/2022	<b>Time</b>	11:00am -12:00pm

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>		
Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Anthony Kelly, Planning Inspector		
Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer	s.caulfield@pleanala.ie	01-8737287
<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>		
Julie Brett – Ecopower Developments Limited		
Pat Brett – Ecopower Developments Limited		

## **Introduction:**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 10<sup>th</sup> 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, known as Gathabawn Windfarm consists of 15 wind turbines with an approximate tip height of 160 to 170 metres and an overall output capacity of between 65-75MW. The proposed development also includes the construction of a 110kV electrical substation.

The proposed development is situated in North Kilkenny and the nearest settlements are Gathabawn village (2 kilometres), Lisdowney village (3 kilometres), Cullahill village (4 kilometres), Freshford village (4 kilometres), Johnstown (5 kilometres), and Ballyragget town (6 kilometres).

The prospective applicant said the proposed development is divided into two land parcels, one to the west consisting of 10 turbines (Ballylehaun area) and one to the east, consisting of 5 turbines (Ballyring area). Both areas are to be joined via an underground cable within the public road network.

The proposed grid connection consists of a 110kV underground cable running mainly along the public road, through Lisdowney windfarm (4 wind turbines), along local roads towards the N77. There is a requirement to cross the River Nore via either an overhead line or Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD), before connecting into the existing Eirgrid station at Moatpark, north of Ballyragget town.

The prospective applicant said the haul route proposed is via the M7 Motorway, onto the Abbeyleix and Durrow Road (N77), before accessing the site. It was submitted that no major works are required along transport routes to facilitate delivery.

The prospective applicant said the site is designated as acceptable in principle within the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027.

It was submitted that the land use is primarily agricultural grassland with a low population density surrounding the site. There is no presence of forestry within the windfarm site boundary but there are small areas of hazel woodland in the Ballylehaun area. The prospective applicant said the bedrock is a mixture of limestone, siltstone and flagstone and said there is no presence of peat within the site.

In relation to water, the prospective applicant said there are several sub-basins in the area and a map was presented to highlight these.

It was submitted that Marsh Fritillary butterfly was recorded in Devils Bit Scabious along the windfarm access road. Alignment of the access road was redesigned to avoid this habitat.

The prospective applicant said no bird or mammal species of particular concern were identified at the windfarm site and said the site has low levels of bat activity.

It is proposed to have a setback distance of approximately 500 metres from involved landowners and no less than 600 metres from other third-party lands. The prospective applicant said background noise measurements are anticipated to commence in late August 2022.

The prospective applicant said a community benefit fund has been developed and will include community organisations in the immediate proximity and a near neighbour payment. It is the prospective applicant's intention to hold an information day in a local venue prior to the submission of the planning application. A dedicated website is also currently being developed.

The nearest designated site is the Cullahill Mountain Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is designated for orchid rich grassland and this SAC adjoins the windfarm site in the Ballylehaun area. It was submitted that two turbines over sail the SAC but that no works are proposed within the SAC boundary. The River Barrow & River Nore SAC and the River Nore SPA are also located within the wider area and would be crossed by the grid connection.

The prospective applicant said there are a number of cultural heritage sites in the general area and there are Record of Monument & Places (RMP) sites within the windfarm site. There are no National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) sites within the windfarm boundary or within close proximity to the grid works.

The prospective applicant provided a summary of topics to be assessed within the EIAR. It noted other permitted or proposed windfarms in the locality including the proposed development of Castlebanny windfarm, which is currently awaiting a decision from the Board, Ballynalacken windfarm, which is at pre-application consultation stage with the Board and the development of Farranrory windfarm. Farranrory wind farm itself has been permitted but the grid connection element in

Kilkenny is awaiting a decision (PA Reg. Ref. 21/627). The prospective applicant said all existing and proposed windfarms/grid connections will be fully assessed within the EIAR.

Consultations have been held with Inland Fisheries Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service and Kilkenny County Council and no items of concern were raised.

Engagement is ongoing with local landowners (approximately 17 in total) and community representatives. The prospective applicant said it is their intention to circulate information to other prescribed bodies in the coming weeks for feedback. Consultations are anticipated in the near future with telecommunication providers and a community liaison officer is expected to be appointed shortly.

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

The prospective applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development falls within the scope of Part 1 of the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006, being a wind farm with an output greater than 50MW. Additionally, it submitted that the grid connection element falls within the scope of section 182A of the Act, being an electricity transmission line of 110kV.

## **Discussion**

The following matters were discussed:


- A general discussion was had around the Kilkenny City & County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Ministerial Direction that previously issued in relation to wind strategy areas. The prospective applicant said this has no significant effect on the proposed development and said this direction focused on areas in south Kilkenny.
- In relation to providing specific turbine dimensions as part of the planning application, the Board's representatives advised that if a specific tip height is not finalised and that ranges are instead brought forward, these configurations within the ranges should be specific and the specific configurations should be

examined in the EIAR to allow the Board to also examine and evaluate the likely impacts.

- The Board's representatives highlighted that the grid connection route proposed for the Farranrory development follows a similar route to the proposed development and they queried whether it would be possible to create one crossing over the River Nore and N77 for both grid connections to Ballyragget, rather than two. The prospective applicant said this may be possible but said it would need to be examined and discussed further. The Board's representatives said if this approach is not brought forward, it still needs to be assessed within the alternatives.
- The Board's representatives said it would strongly recommend consultations with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Irish Water in relation to the crossing of the N77.
- The Board's representatives said the GSI Landslide Susceptibility Map classifies sections of the Ballylehaun site as moderately high and they reminded the prospective applicant to fully consider and address ground stability, particularly in relation to the Ballylehaun site.
- In relation to turbines T4 and T6 which are positioned along the boundary of the SAC, the Board's representatives advised addressing this within the planning application.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said the location of the access road to the substation has not yet been finalised but said it will either link into the internal windfarm road network or directly onto the public road. The final route will be submitted with the planning application. The Board's representatives noted that the internal windfarm road network may avoid construction of a new entrance onto the public road.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide a comprehensive set of photomontages from several viewpoints, including from the scenic viewpoint at Creenkill Beg, Gathabawn village, and the M8/R639.

## **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.

 18/8/22

**Ciara Kellett**

**Assistant Director of Planning**

