



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting ABP-315797-23 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

|   |   |                         |                  |
|---|---|-------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Description</b>                                  | ABP-315797-23 - Proposed wind farm development of approximately 9 wind turbines and all associated works including the provision of a dedicated looped grid connection to the existing 110kV Ardnacrusha substation or a dedicated 110kV connection to Drumline 110kV substation, Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands, Co. Clare |                         |                  |
| <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>   | 04/05/2023  | <b>Time</b>             | 11:00am -12:05pm |
| <b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>                |   |                         |                  |
| Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair) |   |                         |                  |
| Pauline Fitzpatrick, Senior Planning Inspector      |   |                         |                  |
| Sarah Caulfield, Executive Officer                  |   | s.caulfield@pleanala.ie | 01-8737287       |
| Ashling Doherty, Executive Officer                  |   |                         |                  |
| Niamh Hickey, Executive Officer                     |   |                         |                  |
| <b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>       |   |                         |                  |
| Alan Clancy – MKO Ireland                           |   |                         |                  |
| Eoin O'Sullivan – MKO Ireland                       |   |                         |                  |
| Shaun Doolin – MKO Ireland                          |   |                         |                  |

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| Padraig Cregg – MKO Ireland            |
| Jade Power – MKO Ireland               |
| Jack Smith – MKO Ireland               |
| Sandra Kelly – FuturEnergy Ireland     |
| Sinead O’ Malley – FuturEnergy Ireland |

## **Introduction:**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023, 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 with an introduction to the applicant company FuturEnergy Limited, a joint-venture company between Coillte and ESB Networks, an Irish company with an ambition to develop more than 1GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 and contribute to Ireland's renewable energy targets.

The proposed development consists of 9 wind turbines and associated infrastructure at Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands, Co.Clare. The proposed site is located approximately 3 kilometres south of Broadford, 3.5 kilometres southeast of Kilkishen and 4 kilometres northeast of Sixmilebridge. The current land use comprises of coniferous forestry, biodiversity areas under Coillte management and third-party lands. The proposed site covers an area of approximately 931 hectares.

The initial site layout is currently being prepared by taking into consideration a number of planning and environmental constraints within and surrounding the site. These include physical, social, cultural, policy, ecological, hydrological and geotechnical constraints.

The proposed wind energy development will likely comprise approximately 9 wind turbines, access roads and entrances, an electricity substation and wind farm control buildings, borrow pit(s) and all associated site works.

The prospective applicant anticipates applying for a range of Maximum Export Capacity (MEC) and a limited range of turbine parameters. The MEC range is expected to be between 6-7.2MW each, with a turbine tip height between 180-200 metres and a rotor diameter between 149-163 metres.

In relation to the grid connection route, it was noted that two options are currently being considered, one being a loop-in connection to the Ennis/Ardnacrusha 110kV

overhead line and the other via an underground cable to the Ardnacrusha 110kV substation.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of planning policy from a local, national, and European level and highlighted strong policy support within them for renewable energy. It was noted that the proposed development is consistent with overall Local, Regional, National and International policy objectives to increase deployment of renewable energy resources and further reduce the reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation.

The proposed site is located within an area designated primarily as a 'Strategic Area' with the site also partially located within an area which is designated as 'Acceptable in Principle' as outlined in the Clare County Renewable Energy Strategy.

The prospective applicant said the design of the proposed development is constraints led and a constraints map process was undertaken to identify the areas within which no development works will take place and to identify a viable area for development. This map was presented and included constraints such as hen harrier breeding areas (+750 metre buffer), residential dwellings (+ 4 times-tip-height), designated sites (+ 200 metre buffer), rivers and streams (+ 50 metre buffer), telecommunications (operated specified buffer) and archaeological sites and monuments (+ 50 metre buffer).

The Danes Hole, Poulnalecka Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 000030) is located approximately 380 metres to the northwest of the site and one of its qualifying interests is the Lesser Horseshoe Bat. It was submitted that two seasons of bat surveys have been conducted, in accordance with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) guidelines and findings have shown that bats are moving throughout the proposed site. It was noted that there is the potential for some habitat loss due to the land lost to allow for the proposed development. The primary potential impact on bat species was stated to be habitat loss rather than collision risk given that the lesser horseshoe bat observed on the site flies low. Consultations are ongoing with the NPWS in relation to an appropriate mitigation strategy for this potential loss of habitat.

The prospective applicant said approximately 5 years' worth of bird surveys have been carried out on the site. The key receptor here is Hen Harrier and breeding has been evident on the site for a number of years. The most recent survey from 2023 shows Hen Harrier presence on the site. A buffer of 750 metres has been applied from the nesting habitat.

In relation to landscape and visual impact assessment, the prospective applicant said a Landscape Capacity Assessment (LCA) was undertaken at an early stage in the design process to investigate the capacity of the local landscape to accommodate a wind energy development. Imagery was captured from a total of 19 photomontage viewpoints. Choice of viewpoints included factors such as locations where there are views of turbines in two opposing fields of view where a surrounding effect is likely to occur, or in locations where, due to such close proximity to proposed turbines or land form characteristics, turbines may appear dominant. One of the main constraints in the area is the 12 O'Clock Hills' viewpoint, which is located in the middle of the western cluster of turbines. The potential visual effects have been highlighted and considered within the design process. The LCA identified no distinguishing landscape features or impediment to a windfarm development.

The prospective applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development constitutes strategic infrastructure development as the overall output capacity is expected to be greater than 50MW and therefore satisfying the criteria of the 7<sup>th</sup> Schedule. Additionally, it believes the proposed development is of strategic, economic and social importance to the region and to the state.

In January 2023, an EIA scoping document was issued to 52 relevant consultees. Responses have been received from 13 bodies to-date. The NPWS response included items such as archaeological guidelines, bird survey guidelines and information on Hen Harrier breeding areas. Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) highlighted the importance of the protection of streams flowing south from the site into the Blackwater River and flowing north into the Owenogarney, which are both salmonid rivers. The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) requested some further analysis on Instrument Flight Procedures and impacts on the Woodcock Hill Radar. From the scoping responses received to date, none of the consultees have expressed significant concerns in relation to the proposed development.

A pre-application meeting was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023 with Clare County Council. Further consultation is expected once the final layout has been determined.

Detailed consultations have been held and are ongoing with relevant telecommunication and aviation consultees. Assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on telecommunications and aviation will be carried out by way of a desk study and review of the responses received from the relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies.

In relation to public consultation, the prospective applicant said 2 dedicated community liaison officers have been appointed and who have been engaging with the local community in respect of the proposed development. A newsletter issued in April 2023 which included the draft layout. A dedicated project website ([www.knockshanvowindfarm.ie](http://www.knockshanvowindfarm.ie)) and email address ([knockshanvo@futureenergyireland.ie](mailto:knockshanvo@futureenergyireland.ie)) have also been created.

It is the prospective applicant's current intention to lodge the planning application for the proposed development in Q4 2023.

## **Discussion**

The following matters were discussed:

- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said the biodiversity areas as mentioned within the proposed site are Coillte designated areas, and will be avoided as part of the proposed development. These areas mainly consist of bog and heath lands.
- The prospective applicant said there are sections of peat across the site, but they are quite shallow and are no greater than 2 metres in depth. The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of peat stability and said this should be addressed in the EIAR. The prospective applicant said a peat stability assessment will be included with the planning application.

- The Board's representatives referred to the Derryadd Judgement and advised that if a turbine configuration and tip height is not finalised and options are brought forward, that these options should be fully considered in the EIAR to allow the Board to examine and fully evaluate the likely impacts.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said the proposed development is likely to include 9 wind turbines, each with an output capacity between 6-7.2MW. The Board's representatives said the final number of turbines and ranges must be submitted prior to closing the pre-application process.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said approximately 7 out of the 9 turbines will be located on Coillte owned lands and the remaining 2 turbines will be located on lands owned by Irish Forestry Unit Trust (IForUT), and which are lands managed by Coillte. 3<sup>rd</sup> party land is required for access off the regional road and discussions are ongoing in this regard. Full details will be submitted with the planning application.
- The prospective applicant said the indicative turbine delivery route is via Shannon Foynes Port and accessing the site via an access point to the east, off the R465. Discussions are ongoing with Transport Infrastructure Ireland in this regard. The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant that any road modification or improvement works required should be included in the EIAR.
- The prospective applicant said it not yet known whether the grid connection will form part of the planning application. The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant that the assessments must address the development in its entirety, the windfarm development along with the associated grid connection, regardless of whether the grid connection forms part of the planning application.
- In response to a query on bats, the prospective applicant said consultations are ongoing with the NPWS and they hope to present several mitigation options

to it soon. The Board highlighted the importance of consultation with the NPWS prior to submitting the planning application.

- In relation to landscape and visual impact assessment, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to also include viewpoints from Limerick and Tipperary administrative areas. Additionally, consideration should be given to the viewpoints from designated areas and scenic routes within Clare County Council.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that the nearest sensitive receptor would be beyond the recommended 4-times tip height separation distance and located approximately 720 metres from the nearest turbine.
- The Board's representatives highlighted the importance of consultations with IFI given the watercourses within and in the vicinity of the site and the potential downstream impacts in the salmonid waters.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant of the flight paths to Shannon Airport and said these need to be fully assessed within the application.
- The Board's representatives said it would be beneficial to address offshore wind energy in alternatives considered.
- In relation to foundations and hardstanding areas, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide as much information as possible regarding the areas, depths and materials required.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said most of the materials required for the project are expected to come from on-site borrow pits. The Board's representatives said this needs to be fully assessed within the EIAR and any shortfall of material also needs to be fully assessed.
- 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.



- The prospective applicant confirmed that the applicant's name for the proposed development is FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC.

## **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.



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**Stephen Kay**

**Assistant Director of Planning**

