

An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-315920-23 1st meeting

Description	ABP-315920-23 – Proposed Development of Scart Mountain Wind Farm at Scart Mountain, approximately 4 km northeast of Cappoquin, County Waterford		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Venue	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		
Date	27/04/2023	Time	14:00pm – 15:00pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Paul Caprani, 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		
Representing the Prospective Applicant		
Emer Campbell – FuturEnergy		
Sinead O'Malley - FuturEnergy		
John Staunton – Tobin Consulting Engineers		
Oonagh Fleming – Tobin Consulting Engineers		
Cian Doughan - Macroworks		

Introduction:

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 28th 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 up to 17 wind turbines, with a 185-metre tip height and a total generating capacity in the region of 112MW.

The site of the proposed development is located just over 4 kilometres northeast of Cappoquin in Co. Waterford. The site is located adjacent to the Co. Tipperary border. Most of the site is covered in coniferous forestry plantations, with the northernmost areas covered in peatlands. The Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) Special Area of Conservation passes through the northern end of the site.

Access to the site is via a local road network from the N72, with the condition of these roads described as good. Within the windfarm site, there are forest roads which provide good coverage around the site and are well maintained and in good condition.

A map was presented which highlighted the key constraints on the site, including dwelling set-back distances, buffer zones from watercourses and roads and buffer zones for SAC, SPA and telecommunications.

Within the Waterford City & County Council 2022-2028 Wind Energy Strategy, the proposed site is located within an exclusion area. This designation was applied to the site in the most recent County Development Plan. Up to 2022, the site was designated as 'Open to Consideration'. A constraints analysis map was presented of the new wind energy designations with a residential buffer applied (recommended 4-times tip height) which leaves almost no developable area for wind energy developments. It was noted that the landscape has not changed since the previous development plan and the prospective applicant are of the opinion that the proposed site is suitable for wind energy development.

In relation to the grid connection route, it was noted that a number of tail fed connections are currently being assessed in order to connect into the existing 110kV Dungarvan substation. A final route has not yet been agreed and discussions are ongoing with Waterford City & County Council and Transport Infrastructure Ireland in this regard.

The prospective applicant said preliminary and visual assessment as well as autotrack analysis of the constraints along the turbine delivery route have been completed. The route is expected to begin at Belview Port in Co. Kilkenny and travel via the N29, N25 and N72 and onwards to the site via local roads.

EIA scoping was carried out in January 2023 and included a number of consultees including Waterford City & County Council, a number of governmental departments, Irish Aviation Authority, Inland Fisheries Ireland, among others. Consultations are ongoing and feedback received will be incorporated into the EIAR.

The prospective applicant said public consultation is ongoing and included the distribution of two newsletters to residents within 4 kilometres of the proposed site, the publication of a dedicated website (www.scartmountainwindfarm.ie) and the appointment of 2 community liaison officers.

In relation to biodiversity, it was submitted that a number of initial ecological and habitat surveys have been conducted and are ongoing. Bird surveys are ongoing and include vantage point surveys, breeding wader surveys, hen harrier surveys and general breeding and wintering bird surveys. Findings are currently being compiled but notable bird species in the area include hen harrier, snipe, and woodcock.

The prospective applicant said bat surveys are ongoing and are in accordance with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) guidelines. Aquatic habitat assessments and surveys are also ongoing.

In relation to hydrology, it was submitted that the proposed development is located within a number of river catchments including the Glenfallia and Glenshelane rivers.. These catchments are tributaries of the Blackwater River and form part of the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) Special Area of Conservation. Given the proximity

of the development to these river catchments a Natura Impact Statement would be submitted.

In relation to landscape and visual assessment, a 20-kilometre study area has been identified, based on a tip height of 185 metres and in accordance with the current Wind Energy Guidelines. Approximately 30 Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs) have been chosen within this study area from a range of view angles, distances, and receptor types. Given the proximity of the site to the Tipperary border, landscape and visual policy from both Waterford and Tipperary counties would be included and assessed.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the key constraints of the proposed development. Residential dwellings within 5 kilometres of the site will be included within the landscape and visual assessment. It was noted that there are a number of designated scenic routes within the central study area and said an assessment of scenic view and route designations would be included and represented by numerous VRPs. Several notable amenity and heritage receptors are located within the study area, and these will also be included as VRPs, for example, national waymarked walking trails, cycling loops, scenic driving routes, and heritage features such as Mount Mellerary Abbey. The prospective applicant said there is potential for cumulative impacts regarding existing, permitted, and proposed wind farm developments in the area and said this would be fully addressed within the EIAR.

The prospective applicant said surveys are ongoing into Summer 2023. It is expected that Design Iteration 2 (DI2) will be finalised imminently. Further detailed site investigation and surveys are to commence following DI2.

The EIAR is expected to be finalised in Autumn 2023 and a planning application submitted shortly thereafter.

Discussion

The following matters were discussed:

- The Board's representatives said strong justification would be required for the development within a 'no-go area' and advised to consult with Waterford City and County Council in relation to designations within the development plan prior to submitting the planning application.
- The Board's representatives noted the Blackwater River SAC which traverses the northern section of the site and said this needs to be robustly assessed. Additionally, it advised consideration be given to the Blackwater Callows SPA and Blackwater Estuary SPA,, their qualifying interests including the Whooper Swan and the potential for impacts on flight paths.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said an EIA scoping document was issued to the NPWS and feedback has been received. The Board highlighted the importance of consultation with the NPWS prior to submitting the planning application.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said they have engaged with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) for EIA scoping and a short response was received. The Board's representatives highlighted the importance of engaging with IFI given the watercourses within and in the vicinity of the site and the potential downstream impacts.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of potential visual impacts from scenic routes in Waterford and Tipperary and said these must be robustly assessed. It also advised that consideration is given to developments that fall outside the 20-kilometre study area for example the proposed Lyrenacarriga Wind Farm which is currently before the Board for consideration (An Bord Pleanála reference: ABP-309121-21).
- The prospective applicant confirmed that the nearest sensitive receptor would be beyond the recommended 4-times tip height separation distance and

located approximately 740 metres from the nearest turbine. The Board's representatives said noise, shadow flicker and visual impact needs to be fully assessed.

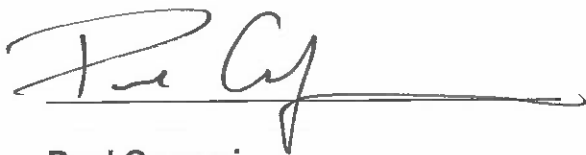
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to regularly check the local planning register for new proposed residential developments in the area to ensure the proposed set back distances can be achieved.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that the grid connection would be tail-fed, and said several options are currently being assessed, one being via the existing road network and another via local roads and over land. A final route has not yet agreed. The Board's representatives referred to the O'Grianna Judgement and said assessments must address the development in its entirety, the windfarm development along with the associated grid connection.
- The Board's representatives referred to the Derryadd Judgement and advised that if a turbine configuration and height is not finalised and ranges are brought forward, these ranges should be fully considered in the EIAR to allow the Board to examine and fully evaluate the likely impacts.
- The Board's representatives said it would be beneficial to address the offshore alternatives for the proposed development and to include this within alternatives considered.
- 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 relation to foundations, hardstanding areas etc., the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide as much information as possible eg. 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.

- The prospective applicant said there are sections of peat across the site, but they are quite shallow. The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of peat stability and said this should be addressed in the EIAR.
- A general discussion was had around community consultation and feedback received to-date. The prospective applicant said the dedicated community liaison officers have been in place for 1 year and have been actively engaging with the community for the last 6 months. The prospective applicant said there is concern among the community in relation to the impacts on water quality and noise. Studies are ongoing in this respect including noise modelling and updated information will be displayed on the dedicated project website as it is received.
- The Board's representatives said it would be helpful if the mitigation measures associated with the proposed development are included within a standalone chapter of the EIAR.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be cognisant of noise and shadow flicker in relation to cumulative impacts from other wind farms in the area.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to review the network of Special Protection Areas (SPA's) in the area and potential flight paths to ensure the wind turbines do not create a barrier along these paths.
- The prospective applicant said engagement has begun with Waterford City and County Council in relation to the new designations and will continue prior to submitting the planning application.
- In relation to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant said it has not decided yet whether the 110kV grid connection will form part of the planning application. This will be confirmed with the Board prior to closing out the pre-application process. The Board's representatives said if two grid connection options are brought forward they both need to be fully assessed within the application.

- The prospective applicant said a standalone community engagement consultation report will be submitted with the planning application.
- The Board's representatives stated their preliminary opinion is that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure development but noted that the ultimate decision is a matter for the Board.

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Caprani', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul Caprani

Assistant Director of Planning

