

An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP- 316466-23 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	Cooloo windfarm consisting of 9 wind turbines with an estimated maximum energy capacity of c.54MW within the townlands of Cooloo, Elmhill, Cloondahamper, Lecarrow and Dangan Eighter, Co. Galway.		
Case Type	Pre-Application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	19 th June 2023	Start Time	11:00am
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams	End Time	12:00pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Paul Caprini, Assistant Director of Planning

Karen Hamilton, Senior Planning Inspector

Ashling Doherty, Executive Officer

Representing the Prospective Applicant

Grace Curran, Neoen

Owen Cahill, MKO

Ronan Dunne, MKO

Colm Ryan, MKO

The meeting commenced at 11:00am

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant 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 it wished to receive advice on from the Board. The Board mentioned general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process as follows:

- 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. The Board may at any time conclude the consultation where it considers appropriate to do so.
- 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 any legal proceedings.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant began its presentation by providing a brief introduction to the project team and topics to be discussed during the meeting. The prospective applicant is Neoen Renewables Ireland, which is a subsidiary of Neoen which was established in 2008 and headquartered in Paris. Neoen entered the Irish market in 2016 and now owns a 53MW portfolio of 8 operating windfarms, along with 3 operating solar farms.

The prospective applicant summarised the proposed development as follows:

The proposed windfarm is located approximately 13.2km east of Tuam and 10.5 km west of Mountbellow, Co. Galway with the site accessed via local roads from the R332 and the N63. The proposed site is predominately agricultural with some active raised blanket bog to the north. Having regard to designated sites Lough Corrib Special Area of Conservation (SAC) overlaps with the proposed development site and Derrinlough Bog is the nearest Natural Heritage Area (NHA). The proposed site has been assessed in terms of constraints and viability for the project, with a mapping constraint led design approach which includes Natura 2000 and Designated Sites plus a 200m buffer, dwelling setback of 720m, watercourses plus 50m buffer. The prospective applicant is proposing to develop a 9 turbine windfarm which includes a turbine tip height of 108m, a 110kV onsite substation and underground cable connecting into Cloon to Lanesborough 100kV overhead line, generating capacity of circa 54MW and a battery energy storage facility of circa 50MW capacity.

The prospective applicant referred to some local and European policy documents which includes Energy Security and REPowerEU, National Energy Security Framework, Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. Having regard to the County Galway Co Council Renewable Energy strategy, they highlighted a wind energy designation map which was broken down into 5 areas including, strategic areas, acceptable in principle, open to consideration, generally to be discouraged and not normally permissible. Of the 9 proposed turbines 6, are located in the open to consideration area, with the remaining 3 located in an area generally to be discouraged.

The prospective applicant discussed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIAR) and provided a brief synopsis under each heading. They highlighted that the EIAR will provide a clear separation for the proposed 37B application and the proposed 182E application.

The prospective applicant presented a map which showed a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to which was colour coded to show the number of turbines theoretically visible. The LVIA has been an iterative process to inform project design and with scenic routes, designated views and amenity trails all being considered.

Community consultation has commenced which includes door to door and leaflet drops within 1km of the proposed location, there is currently a live website, and they hope to hold public consultation meetings in early autumn. A scoping document has also been circulated to prescribed statutory bodies in April 2023, with pre-application consultations due to be held with Galway County Council.

The prospective applicant hopes to lodge the application in quarter 4 of 2023.

Discussion:

The Board's representative raised a number of concerns which include the following:

That three of the turbines are not located in the area open to consideration, as per the current development plan. There should be clear justification as to why the turbines were located outside of the area. Should the three turbines be removed from the proposal the SID determination may change and the proposal may not meet those thresholds.

The area where the proposed turbines are to be located are underlain by a significant amount of peat. The potential for landslide or drainage issues was discussed.

From site inspection there is a number of rural dwellings located near the proposed development. The constraints map could have included the location of these dwellings. It would be important that the dwellings are illustrated with buffers overlapped with proposed turbines.

In response to the Board's concerns the prospective applicant stated the turbine locations are not finalised, but location justification will be submitted with the application. A robust geotechnical assessment will be carried out which will include a peat stability risk assessment plan and drainage proposals for the proposed site. All necessary plans and particulars will be submitted with any future application.

The Board's representative recommended further consultation with Galway County Council.

Having regard to the landscape and visual impact the Board's representatives noted that the study area extended to a radius of 20km and as such, the windfarm may be visible from south Roscommon so communication with Roscommon County Council is recommended.

The Board's representatives sought clarify if large-scale forestry is being removed as part of the proposed development to which the prospective applicant stated there is forestry felling in the region of 3 hectares. The Board's representative recommended submitting a robust bat survey which should take into consideration the potential effects of barotrauma.

The Board's representatives highlighted the importance of referring to the impact of the proposal on river catchment and sub catchment in both the EIAR and NIS is important.

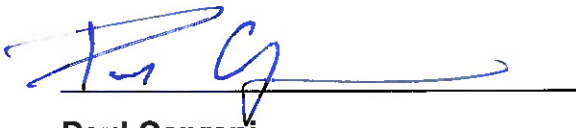
The Board's representatives recommend engagement with National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to discuss their concerns prior to submitting the application. Having regard to the EIAR Directive the Board requested the applicant to ensure the EIAR addresses the issue in relation to Vulnerability of the Proposed Development to Major Accidents and Natural Disasters. Also the chapter entitled 'Interaction of the Foregoing' should be located after all the environmental factors listed under Annex III of the Directive are assessed. In relation to the Natura Impact Statement (NIS) the Board noted that is a large number of Natura 2000 and Natural Heritage Sites located at the proposed development and recommends that the Natura 2000 sites are within the zone of influence be robustly assessed, rather than assessing all Natura 2000 sites within an arbitrary radius of say 15km.

The Board sought clarity on the turbine delivery route option to which the prospective applicant stated they are hoping to use Galway Port.

Conclusion:

The record of the instant meeting will issue in due course and the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of any further meeting. The onus is on the prospective applicant to either request a further meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12:00PM



Paul Caprani

Assistant Director of Planning