



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-316480-23 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-316480-23 - Proposed new 110kV substation to connect into the existing Thornsbury substation, located at Ballyteige Little, Co. Offaly.		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	17/07/2023	Start Time	11:00am
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams	End Time	11:35am

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Stephen Kay – Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)

Karla McBride – Senior Planning Inspector

Evan McGuigan – Administrative Assistant

Representing the Prospective Applicant

Paul Neary – Neo Environmental Limited

Rachel Buchanan – Renewable Energy Systems Limited

Introduction:

The meeting commenced at 11:00am.

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 26th April 2023, requesting pre-application consultations under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, 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's representatives 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 presentation began with a brief introduction to the prospective applicant, Renewable Energy Systems (RES). The prospective applicant stated that it has been active in Ireland for over 20 years and operates across 11 different countries. It also stated that it has a solar development/planning portfolio in Ireland for 800MW.

The prospective applicant provided an introduction to the proposed development, which is a 110kV tail fed substation that would be used to facilitate two solar farms. These two farms are the Ballyteige Solar Farm (PA Reference: 2198), which has received permission, and the proposed Derrygrogan Solar Farm (PA Reference: 22378), which is currently a live planning application with a decision due to be made by the 24th August 2023. The applications for both solar farm developments have been submitted by RES. The prospective applicant submitted that landowner agreements are in place for the proposed substation. It also reiterated its commitment to the delivery of both solar farm developments and the proposed substation.

The prospective applicant stated that the proposed development would be located within the boundary of the permitted Ballyteige Solar Farm. The application site in which the substation is proposed to be located is primarily in a field of relatively flat agricultural land, which includes a small portion of a second field separated from the main field by a redundant hedgerow. Access to the proposed substation would be from the Kilbeggan Road to the east of the application site, which is the same entrance point for the Ballyteige Solar Farm. The prospective applicant submitted that there are no receptors present in the location.

The prospective applicant presented several designs regarding the layout of the proposed development, including a number of elevation views. It submitted that the proposed substation area would be around 6.22 acres. The proposed substation would include one transformer station, one EirGrid substation and a switch room. It would also include palisade and concrete post/rail fencing for security reasons.

The prospective applicant stated that the proposed substation would connect into the existing Thornsberry substation and that the proposed method would be a tail fed

connection. It also submitted that the proposed development lies within one local authority only and that it does not lie within any designated areas.

The prospective applicant confirmed that once the proposed substation is energized, it would be handed over to EirGrid and come under its ownership. It also stated that it is due to hold a meeting with EirGrid regarding designs and to ensure all proposed equipment is standard and would meet EirGrid functional specifications.

The prospective applicant stated its belief that the proposed substation would not constitute an EIA development. It was submitted that the reports in a full application for the proposed development would include ones on landscape, archaeology, noise, transport and flood risk, as well as a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). The prospective applicant also stated its belief that the proposed development is in line with the criteria outlined in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and therefore constitutes a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) case.

Discussion:

- The Board's representatives stated that based on the presentation from the prospective applicant, and having regard to the provisions of section 182A of the Act, it is likely that the proposed development would constitute a SID case – but ultimately a final decision on this would be made by the Board.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that the Thornberry substation is located 6km along roads from the proposed development. The prospective applicant also stated that it intended to use an underground cable routed along the roads to connect the two substations, but that this was also largely dependent on the outcome of the meeting due to be held with EirGrid. It was confirmed that this meeting is due to be held in July, and that the planned route for the underground cable and grid connection would most likely be finalised in the third or fourth quarter of this year.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that they intended to include the underground cable and

grid connection in the application. The Board's representatives stated that they were happy to proceed on the basis that these elements will be included, and advised the prospective applicant that it would be beneficial to hold the meeting with EirGrid first before deciding on whether to close off the pre-application consultations or not.

- The Board's representatives stated that it appears that this proposed development would not constitute an EIA development – but that this may change if, for example, an overhead connection for the two substations is proposed instead of an underground cable.
- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant if environmental issues that were raised during the application process for the consented Ballyteige Solar Farm would be considered for the proposed development, particularly in terms of the local badger population and buffer zones. The prospective applicant said that it is aware of these issues and that background work is being done on them – including topographical surveys and a CEMP. It also stated that buffer zones would be included and that based on surveys undertaken it doesn't believe that there are badgers located in the proposed substation area.
- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant if there are any issues regarding the nearby canal, given its potential as a natural heritage area. The prospective applicant stated that the main canal is located to the south of the proposed development and that the portion of the canal close to the proposed development is a dry channel that is now wooded. It also stated that the proposed underground cable would be located along the road and would not impact the canal. It said that the issues concerning the canal would be included and addressed in the application, but that it doesn't believe there'll be any significant impacts.
- In response to a question from the Boards representatives the prospective applicant stated that the connection to the solar farm to the north of the dry canal would involve a directional drill.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that no public consultations or discussions with the

planning authority or prescribed bodies had taken place yet regarding the proposed development.

- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant if there are any potential issues concerning the redundant hedgerow in the application site in which the substation is proposed to be located. The prospective applicant said that it doesn't believe there would be any significant issues regarding this and stated that this feature is very sparse and primarily comprised of gorse.
- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant if there are any visually sensitive locations (from around the canal and roadways) that could be impacted by the proposed development, particularly given the height of the proposed substation in comparison to the solar farm. The prospective applicant said that it doesn't believe there would be significant impacts regarding this issue. It stated that the main canal walkway is located alongside the portion of the canal that is situated to the south of the proposed development and that it doesn't envisage any significant visual impact. It also stated that work concerning visual issues had been done in the application for the consented Ballyteige Solar Farm, and that these issues would be considered in an application for the proposed development.
- A general discussion followed between the Board's representatives and the prospective applicant regarding timelines for the closure of consultations and issuing of an opinion from the Board. The Board's representatives reiterated to the prospective applicant the benefits of waiting until discussions are held with EirGrid regarding the proposed development as well as other consultations before deciding whether to request the closure of consultations or not but acknowledged that this was ultimately a matter for it to decide.

Conclusion:

The record of the 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 or formal closure of the pre-application consultation process.

The meeting concluded at 11:35am.



Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning