

An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-317599-23 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-317599-23 – Proposed development of a 400 kV underground cable between Woodland 400 kV Substation located in the townland of Woodland, Co. Meath and Belcamp Substation in the townlands of Clonshaugh and Belcamp, Co Dublin, known as the 'East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade.		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	08/09/2023	Start Time	11:00am
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams	End Time	12:10pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Stephen Kay – Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)

Niall Haverty – Senior Planning Inspector

Evan McGuigan – Executive Officer

Representing the Prospective Applicant

Leah Kenny – EirGrid

Christie Elliot – EirGrid

Andy Scott – Jacobs

Voirrey Costain – Jacobs

Stephanie McGlynn – Jacobs

Introduction:

The meeting commenced at 11:00am.

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 19th July 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 prospective applicant began the presentation with an introduction to the project team and a breakdown of the rationale for the proposed development. It stated that the proposed development (known as the East Meath-North Dublin Grid Upgrade) is one of two main projects that it (EirGrid) is progressing – the other being the Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade (ABP-316372-23).

The prospective applicant submitted that the main drivers for the proposed development included the need to improve power transfer and capacity across the transmission network with a view to achieving Climate Action Plan (CAP) targets, as well as ensuring the security of the network feeding the area between the Woodland and Belcamp substations. It also submitted that other drivers for the proposed development included increased electricity demand in the area, the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation, and the need to facilitate further development of renewable energy generation. It stated that the proposed development would deliver benefits relating to competition, sustainability, security of supply, the economy and community.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the proposed development, which would comprise a new 400 kV electricity transmission connection between the existing Woodland 400 kV substation (located in Co. Meath) and the existing Belcamp 220 kV substation (located in Co. Dublin). This would include the installation of an underground cable estimated to be 37km in length to connect the two substations, which would be mainly located along public roads but will also cross private lands. It would further include an upgrade to the Woodland substation, an upgrade to the Belcamp substation – including a new 400 kV Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) building – and ancillary site development works.

The prospective applicant provided a timeline of the proposed development and the work undertaken on the project to date. It submitted that the need for the proposed development was confirmed in 2017 and that, by 2020, it had identified technical options for the project – including options for both underground and overhead connections. In 2021, the prospective applicant reconfirmed the need for the proposed development and undertook work to identify the best option regarding

cable routes. It submitted that it intends to confirm the underground cable route for the proposed development by the end of this month (September 2023).

The prospective applicant stated that it had identified four potential underground cable routes for the proposed development and that it had taken several principles into account regarding route selection. These principles included maximising the use of national, regional and local roads, minimising impact on communities, and avoiding motorways, town centres, agricultural land, heritage sites and private land where possible. It also considered the constraints of the study area relating to roads, the environment, water, gas, drainage, biodiversity, city and county development plans and local area plans.

Drawings of the four potential underground cable routes were presented by the prospective applicant. It stated that these options had been developed by taking socio-economic, deliverability, technical, environmental, feedback and economic factors into account. The prospective applicant said that it had undertaken several stages of feedback with the public and stakeholders regarding the potential underground cable routes and that engagements were continuing.

The prospective applicant stated that in March 2023 it had identified one of the potential underground cable routes – Option A – as the best performing option. It stated that this underground cable route is currently the preferred option due to a number of technical and environmental factors, while also submitting that it is the most deliverable option, the shortest available route, would have the lowest impacts on infrastructure and had received the most support from landowners and consultations with stakeholders.

The preferred underground cable route (Option A) was showcased in more detail by the prospective applicant. It presented several drawings showing the cable route exiting the Woodland substation to the south and crossing through agricultural lands before joining the nearby road route (R156) and continuing southeast. The route would then travel northeast along the R157 before reaching a refinement area – the prospective applicant stated that this area is still being assessed for a preferred route as there are constraints related to motorway and river crossings.

The route would then continue east along regional roads bypassing Kilbride before travelling northeast along the R121 and crossing the M2. After going southeast on the R122, the route would then travel along the northern parameters of Dublin Airport before crossing the M1 and entering another refinement area before joining with Belcamp substation. The prospective applicant stated that it is engaging with landowners in this refinement area regarding a preferred route.

The prospective applicant presented several images showcasing works being carried out for underground cables, joint bays and passing bays in a public roadway. It submitted that there would be around 50 joint bays used for the proposed development and that they would typically be located every 750m along the cable route. It submitted that assessments were ongoing regarding passing bays and where both they and joint bays would be located. It further submitted that it was taking issues concerning trees, hedgerows, road traffic management and landowner consent into consideration regarding the location of the passing and joint bays. The prospective applicant stated that an estimated 9km (38%) of the preferred underground cable route is proposed to cross private land.

The prospective applicant stated that the preferred underground cable route would involve several crossings of watercourses, drainage ditches, utilities, motorways and a railway. It has identified three different crossing techniques which would be used along this route – horizontal directional drilling, open-cut trenching, and constructing a cable bridge.

Regarding the Woodland substation, the prospective applicant stated that a recent planning application submitted to Meath County Council (221550) for a new Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) substation on-site has been consented. It also stated that the work involved in the proposed development would include additional electrical equipment and apparatus, a potential extension on the substation compound, a potential extension to the control building, and the renewal, alteration and removal of associated equipment as required.

Regarding the Belcamp substation, the prospective applicant stated that there are two planning applications to Fingal County Council involving the substation – one which is still an active case (F23A/0040) and one which has been consented (FS5-026/19). It stated that the work at the substation involved in the proposed

development would include a new 400kV substation, additional electrical equipment and apparatus, a potential extension on the substation compound, a potential extension to the control building, and the renewal, alteration and removal of associated equipment as required. The prospective applicant further stated that the Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade (ABP-316372-23) would also involve the Woodland and Belcamp substations.

The prospective applicant stated that it considers the proposed development to qualify as a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) having regard to section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and requested the view of the Board in this regard.

The prospective applicant stated that it believes the proposed development may fall within Annex I or II of the Environment Impact Assessment Directive and relevant Irish legislation (as amended in July 2023), and therefore may potentially require an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). It submitted that the proposed development would involve the permanent and temporary removal of field boundary hedgerows and that an Environmental Impact Assessment screening addressing the matter is currently being prepared. It requested the view of the Board regarding whether an EIAR and Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required for the proposed development.

The prospective applicant provided a breakdown of the various topics it has undertaken work on regarding AA screening, environmental issues and planning considerations, and stated that its aim is to have a fully compliant application for the proposed development. It stated that it has consulted with both Fingal County Council and Meath County Council regarding planning and environmental concerns and that engagements are ongoing. It further stated that it did not believe there would be any significant issues regarding the potential impact of the proposed development on Dublin Airport.

The prospective applicant submitted that it had carried out consultations with the public and a range of stakeholders regarding the proposed development – among which included email correspondence, postal questionnaires, print and online media engagement and stakeholder meetings. It submitted that the feedback received from various stakeholders had been generally favourable and that a number of concerns

which had been raised during these engagements would be taken into consideration. These concerns included traffic congestion, road disruption, environmental impacts, health impacts and the potential underground cable route.

The prospective applicant stated that a number of activities were ongoing regarding the proposed development, including pinch point analysis, landowner consultation, stakeholder consultation and environmental surveys. It also stated that it is currently preparing planning application documentation for the proposed development and is using the Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade (ABP-316372-23) case as a template. It further stated that it is reviewing requirements for potentially upgrading its Environmental Considerations Report to an EIAR if required.

The prospective applicant reiterated that it intends to publish its preferred underground cable route for the proposed development by the end of this month. It stated that it is aiming to submit an application for the proposed development in the first quarter of 2024 and that it is likely to request a further consultation meeting for November or December 2023 to discuss any specific environmental issues arising. It also stated its belief (on the basis of previous projects) that two or three meetings would be required before it closes off consultations.

Discussion:

- The Board's representatives stated that, based on the presentation from the prospective applicant, 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.
- Regarding the requirement of an EIAR for the proposed development, the Board's representatives stated that they could not give the prospective applicant an indication regarding the requirement for an EIAR and that consideration of whether EIA was required was a matter for the applicant in the first instance. They noted that the Board is aware of the July amendments to the Act, with regard to removal of hedgerows and restructuring of rural landholdings.

- The Board’s representatives advised the prospective applicant to take into consideration the recent High Court case *Four Districts Woodland Habitat Group v An Bord Pleanála* (IEHC 335 [2023]), where a judge considered that extensive hedgerow removal materially contravened objectives of the Development Plan which sought to protect hedgerows. The prospective applicant said that it would take this and all legal issues into consideration.
- In response to a query from the Board’s representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that a typical passing bay would comprise of a 100-metre-long strip of land at the edge of one side of the road. The prospective applicant stated that out of a projected 37 passing bays for the proposed development, 10 of them would affect hedgerows and that this issue was being taken into consideration.
- The Board’s representatives advised the prospective applicant to be aware of the potential project-splitting issue if it submits an EIAR for the proposed development.
- The Board’s representatives asked the prospective applicant if it is seeking to acquire landowners’ consent for the proposed development prior to the submitting of an application. The prospective applicant said that this is their preference and that it would take SID requirements regarding consent into consideration.
- The Board’s representatives asked the prospective applicant what was meant by the following phrase in item 5 of the Description of Development set out in its cover letter submitted to the Board – “The potential of the 400kV UGC (underground cable) forming part of a wider ‘transmission cable corridor’ on the approach to Belcamp (substation)”. The prospective applicant said that this relates to its aim to futureproof the underground cable route’s approach into Belcamp substation and to minimise the impact on landowners in the area. It stated that it is currently consulting with landowners and taking their concerns into consideration regarding this issue.
- The Board’s representatives advised the prospective applicant to take issues regarding impacts of hedgerow removal on biodiversity including mammal populations, birds and bats, culverting of roadside ditches and potential surface

water and flooding impacts into consideration in respect of the proposed development.


- The Board's representatives noted the nature of the receiving environment and the considerable number of projects that the proposed development has the potential to interact with. They advised the prospective applicant to take into account potential interactions with the M1, M2, M3 motorways, strategic roads, railways, the MetroLink, the MetroLink cable project, BusConnects and Uisce Éireann projects, including the Greater Dublin Drainage project.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant stated that a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would be included in any future application for the proposed development.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide detailed information regarding potential road closures, road diversions and road works as a result of the proposed development, as well as potential impacts on road infrastructure and access for landowners and companies. The potential for impacts on traffic flows and congestion were noted.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to engage with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the two local authorities regarding any requirements they may have for road works and reinstatement. They also advised that engagement occur with Inland Fisheries Ireland, Office of Public Works, Dublin Airport Authority and the National Parks and Wildlife Service regarding the proposed development.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide a method statement for construction of any potential water crossings in respect of the proposed development.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to include joint and passing bays on any drawings for the proposed development. In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant stated that some above ground-level infrastructure such as link boxes would be included as part of the proposed development. The Board's representatives advised that construction compounds, buffer zones at watercourses etc. should be shown on the drawings.

- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to address the potential impacts of construction work for the proposed development regarding noise, residents and nearby amenities.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to demonstrate how the proposed development is related to the Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade (ABP-316372-23) and to ensure that there are no conflicts between the two projects at Woodland Substation. The importance of addressing any potential cumulative impacts or in-combination effects was noted.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to address any issues regarding archaeology that may arise from construction, particularly in undisturbed off-road areas for the proposed development.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant submitted that the preferred underground cable route would involve crossing one masonry bridge. It stated that it is conducting survey work regarding this issue.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to take any culture and heritage-related issues (particularly in relation to hedgerows defining townland boundaries and historic masonry bridges) into consideration regarding the proposed development.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant stated that it is probable that there will be multiple construction works ongoing at the same time regarding the proposed development. It stated that it would consult with its contractors and the planning authorities regarding this issue, and that the public would be updated on any potential works. The Board's representatives advised that proposed phasing and programme be set out in the application, that the public consultation process be documented and that the construction phase communications strategy be detailed.
- The prospective applicant stated its intention to schedule a second consultation meeting for the proposed development for December 2023, and its belief that two meetings would be sufficient before requesting formal closure of the pre-application consultation process. It further stated that it would take all the advice from the Board's representatives into consideration. The Board's representatives replied that they were happy to proceed on this basis.

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 12:10pm.



Stephen Kay**Assistant Director of Planning**