



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-317901-23 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-317901-23 - Proposed 220kV loop in substation to connect to Eirgrid transmission network and underground grid connection to proposed solar farm located at Mulhussey Townlands, Kilclone, Co. Meath.		
Case Type	Pre-application Consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	16/10/2023	Start Time	14:30pm
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams	End Time	15:15pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Paul Caprani – Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Brid Maxwell – Planning Inspector
Evan McGuigan – Executive Officer

Representing the Prospective Applicant
Kieran Tarpey – Entrust Limited
Ciara Maguire – Entrust Limited
Ciaran Donnelly – GP Joule Ireland Limited
Niamh Igoe – GP Joule Ireland Limited
Kieran Norris – GP Joule Ireland Limited

Introduction:

The meeting commenced at 14:30pm.

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 28th August 2023, requesting pre-application consultations under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. It 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 started with an introduction to the project team and the consultants involved in the project.

It began its presentation with a description of the proposed development. It was stated the proposed development would consist of a 220kV substation which would loop into the existing Maynooth–Gorman 220kV line. The proposed substation would comprise of a Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) building, a transformer compound, a medium-voltage switchgear building, a battery storage compound and a control building. The ancillary works involved would include a temporary construction compound and access track for construction and operational phases.

The site for the proposed development is located in the townlands of Mulhussey, Co. Meath, around 6km from Kilcock and 8km from Maynooth. The prospective applicant submitted that the site's terrain is mostly flat, arable land and that the predominant land-use in the surrounding area is agricultural. It further submitted that the wider area accommodates some commercial uses, stud farms, houses, Mulhussey National School and Larchill Arcadian Gardens.

The prospective applicant stated that the rationale for the substation is to connect the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm to the EirGrid transmission network. The prospective applicant presented drawings showcasing the layout of the proposed substation and where the proposed substation would be located within the boundary of the proposed solar farm.

The prospective applicant stated that the site is categorised in the Meath County Development Plan, as a Rural Area and submitted that sustainable energy installations and utility structures are permitted under this Land Use Zoning Category. The site of the proposed development is located in Landscape Character Area (LCA) 12 – 'Tara Skryne Hills' and is of exceptional value and high sensitivity.

The prospective applicant submitted that preliminary environmental investigations have been undertaken and have informed the location and layout of the proposed development. The location has also been informed through archaeological, geophysical and hydrology surveys. The proposed development is located within the hydrological catchment of the River Rye and the prospective applicant stated that

ecological effects would be considered with regard to the proposed solar farm development by way of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS). The prospective applicant also stated that a pre-application meeting had been held with Meath County Council on 13th July 2023 regarding the proposed solar farm, with reference made to the proposed substation.

The prospective applicant presented a map which showcased the protected structures, NIAH entries and Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) located within the vicinity of the proposed development. It was noted that the Larchill Arcadian Gardens is one of the main heritage sites in this area and it was asserted that, given the surrounding woodland, the proposed development will have little impact on it in terms of visibility.

The prospective applicant stated that a non-invasive geophysical survey has been conducted throughout the site of the proposed development to assess the potential regarding below-ground archaeology. Based on this survey, an area – designated as Site P – was identified within the site of the proposed development which suggested the presence of potential archaeological features. The prospective applicant outlined that the proposed substation was moved in order to avoid this site. It was stated that the footprint of the revised location for the proposed substation was archaeologically tested and that no archaeological features, sites or deposits were encountered. Full details on this would be provided in an Archaeological Impact Assessment.

Regarding hydrology, the site of the proposed development has been screened for potential fluvial, pluvial and groundwater flood risk. The prospective applicant stated that initial findings indicate that the site does not fall within a predictive, indicative, anecdotal or historical fluvial or groundwater flood zone. It stated that a limited portion of the site is located within an indicative extreme 1% and 0.1% Annual Exceedance Probability pluvial flood zone and that the proposed substation would be located beyond any of these pluvial zones within the site. It submitted that a surface water management plan would be put in place and that the proposed development would not result in a significant impact to the existing hydrological regime of the area or increase flood risk elsewhere.

Regarding ecology, the prospective applicant stated that the site of the proposed development is comprised of fields of arable crops and that the main biodiversity

features include hedgerows and drainage ditches with no connectivity to the nearest natural watercourse (the Bryanstown stream). The nearest European Site to the proposed development is the Rye Water Valley/Carton Special Area of Conservation (SAC), while the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and Special Protection Area (SPA) are also located nearby but are not hydrologically connected. The prospective applicant stated that the proposed development would entail earth movement and construction, an NIS would be produced and accompanied by a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) in any potential application. It also presented drawings which showcased ecological features and designations in the vicinity of the proposed development.

Regarding transport, the prospective applicant submitted that on-site consultations had been held with Meath County Council and that a transport study and swept path analysis would be carried out. The prospective applicant stated that the gated entrance to the south of the site of the proposed development would need to be widened and that some clearance of vegetation would be required as a result. As ownership covers the whole frontage, it stated that third party land consent would not be required for this activity.

The prospective applicant stated its belief that the proposed development qualifies as a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) case and asked the Board's representatives for its view regarding this. It also considered that a potential application for the proposed development would not require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and again asked the Board's representatives for its view regarding this.

Discussion:

- In response to a query from the Board's representatives regarding the proposed solar farm, the prospective applicant stated that it currently intends to submit a planning application to the planning authority in November.
- 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 that ultimately a final decision on this would be made by the Board.
- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant how much vegetation would be required to be removed during work undertaken at the gated entrance to the south of the site of the proposed development. The prospective applicant stated that it would be likely that a small number of metres of a hedgerow would need to be removed, but that a precise measurement is yet to be confirmed. It stated that site access would occur at this area.
- The Board's representatives noted that while the proposed substation is not a class of development contained in Schedule 5, parts 1 or 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations, the prospective applicant is advised to carry out a preliminary screening regarding an EIA for the proposed development having regard to the cumulative assessment with the associated solar development, noting the issues of hedgerow removal and restructuring of rural landholdings. The prospective applicant stated that it would take this suggestion on board and seek expert advice regarding the matter.
- The Board's representatives asked the prospective applicant to clarify reference in its letter to the Board dated 25th August 2023 to 'additional future expansion space required by EirGrid'. The prospective applicant stated that it does not anticipate future land acquisition / expansion. The compact gas insulated design of the substation would enable the construction of 8 bays, where only 3 are anticipated to be required. It was submitted that the proposed substation would be constructed within EirGrid requirements within the smallest space available, to try and minimise the footprint of impacts locally.

- The Board's representatives noted in terms of the sensitivities of the site that there are a number of residential dwellings proximate to the proposed development and within the local area.
- Regarding the exceptional value and high sensitivity of the LCA, the prospective applicant stated that it has undertaken investigations concerning landscape and visual issues. It submitted that it intends to protect the environmental features in the surrounding area and that it would potentially undertake work regarding landscape mitigation in the area to the south of the proposed development.
- A discussion between the Board's representatives and the prospective applicant was held regarding the requirement of an NIS for the proposed development. The prospective applicant stated that it is its intention to submit an NIS as part of any future application. The Board's representatives advised that should it submit an NIS to ensure that it is of a formal standard.
- In response to a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant stated that the Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC would be the only SAC impacted by the proposed development and that it would be addressed in the CEMP.
- A general discussion was held between the Board's representatives and the prospective applicant regarding the requirement for a further meeting. The Board's representatives advised that should any further information or data of significance arise in the meantime (particularly regarding visual impacts), then a second meeting could be warranted. The prospective applicant replied that it would take this into consideration and stated its intention to submit a robust planning application for the proposed development.

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 15:15pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Caprani', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Paul Caprani

Assistant Director of Planning