

An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting ABP-319042-24

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	ABP-319042-24 - 110kV 'loop-in loop-out' electricity substation and approximately 6.5km of underground electricity cables. Moyvannan, Feamore, Lisbaun, Lissygreaghan, Gortacoosan, Ballycreggan, Corrantotan, Knocknanool and Ballymullavill Co. Roscommon.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	08/04/2024	<b>Start Time</b>	2:30 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	Virtually	<b>End Time</b>	3:15 p.m.

<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>
<b>Staff Members</b>
Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Sarah Lynch, Senior Planning Inspector
Ellen Moss, Executive Officer

<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>
Simon Carleton, Senior Planner, Galetch Energy Services
Tony Gallagher, Project Manager, Energia Renewables
Sara Tinsley, Planning & Environmental Consents Manager, Energia Renewables

## **Introduction**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, 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 made by the prospective applicant:**

The prospective applicant provided a general description of the proposed development, which would comprise of a 110kV 'loop-in loop-out' electricity substation and approximately 6.5km of underground electricity cables. The prospective applicant stated that the proposed development would provide an alternative connection point to the national electricity network for the permitted Seven Hills Wind Farm (ABP-313750-22), which was granted permission by the Board in November 2023. The prospective applicant stated that due to the recent changes in the available capacity at Monksland substation in Athlone, connection at that point is no longer guaranteed to be feasible and hence why an alternative grid connection option is being pursued.

The prospective applicant described the location of the site which is c.8km northwest of Athlone, and immediately north/northeast of Brideswell. The proposed development is located within a generally undulating landscape used for agricultural grassland/ pasture. The wider environs have small pockets of forestry and low-lying wetland areas. Lough Ree, situated to the east, and Lough Funshinagh located to the northwest of the proposed site are both notable landscape features. The area is sparsely populated with one-off rural dwellings and agricultural buildings. The prospective applicant outlined how the proposed underground electricity lines would follow local and regional roads and would predominately be installed within the paved carriageway of those roads.

The prospective applicant outlined the extensive site identification process undertaken. In particular, the prospective applicant outlined how the location was selected due to the ease of access with the M61 to the east, proximity to the existing Athlone-Lanesborough 110kV overhead transmission line, the absence of European-designated nature conservation sites, the general absence of sensitive flora and fauna and the absence of complex geologies, watercourses, and flood risk. The

design options of the proposed site allow for 'mitigation by avoidance' regarding cultural heritage features. The nearest dwellings are over 300 meters from the proposed substation.

The prospective applicant stated that an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) would be submitted with any application. It was also stated that consultants working on behalf of the prospective applicant have conducted environmental scoping and constraints analysis of the soil, water, biodiversity, noise, etc.

The prospective applicant discussed biodiversity, land and soil, water and cultural heritage through the maps provided. Ornithology surveys commenced in October 2023 and are ongoing. Due to the bedrock surface and the presence of karst features at the proposed site, site specific site investigations were carried out to confirm it could accommodate the proposed infrastructure. There are turlough and other water bodies in the area and the prospective applicant stated that there will be no discharge from the site to these water bodies. No significant effects on cultural heritage features are anticipated. Following the completion of the primary scoping process and environmental constraints analysis, the prospective applicant noted that no fundamental concerns were expressed by the consultees. Localised constraints such as the archaeological features and the presence of small karst features were identified. Ornithology surveys have identified that there is no usage from species of interest on the proposed site, however there is a small amount of usage of the turloughs to the south.

The prospective applicant stated that the next steps regarding the proposed development are to continue preparing the EIAR and NIS and continuing consultations with the Planning Authority and the roads section of the local authority. Public consultations will commence in the coming weeks. The prospective applicant

stated its opinion that the proposed development would constitute Strategic Infrastructure Development and that they intend to lodge an application in July 2024.

**Discussion:**

- The Board's representatives gave their preliminary view that, considered in isolation, the proposed development may be considered strategic infrastructure development but noted that the final decision would be a matter for the Board.
- The Board's representatives queried the justification for the change in the development necessitating the revised connection to Monksland substation. The prospective applicant stated that when the Seven Hills Windfarm was originally submitted in 2022 there was capacity for the Windfarm to connect to the Monksland substation. However, in the intervening period, two solar developments have submitted connection applications to EirGrid and, in the event that these developments also connect to the Monksland substation, there would not be sufficient capacity to accommodate the permitted windfarm development.
- The prospective applicant stated that given the uncertainty of connection to the Monksland substation they were forced to develop an alternative option to ensure the viability of the scheme.
- The Board's representative queried the prospective applicant's approach in terms of seeking a pre app under Section 182 of the Act when the permitted windfarm and grid connection were determined under Section 37 of the Act. Specifically, the Board's representatives queried what would be the consequential effect of the proposed alternative grid connection outlined in this pre application consultation for the build out of the permission that the prospective applicant has under s.37, which includes a grid connection to Monksland substation.
- The prospective applicant stated that given the uncertainty of the grid connection they have been forced to seek permission for an alternative stand-alone connection under Section 182, however it is recognised that this would

mean that the entirety of the permitted Seven Hills windfarm (ie the balance of the permitted grid connection route to Monksland substation) would not be constructed. The prospective applicant stated that in the event that connection to the Monksland substation is not feasible they intend to submit a 146B application to amend the original windfarm and grid connection application to remove the section of grid connection from Brideswell (where the proposed grid connection route connects with the currently permitted grid connection) to Monksland Substation and implement the current proposal in its place.

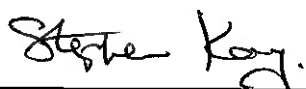
- The prospective applicant stated that, subject to a SID determination on foot of this pre application consultation, it is intended to pursue the option of the alternative grid connection by way of an application under s182A of the Act. The 146B application would follow subsequently in the event that the alternative grid connection option was required.
- The Board's representatives noted the approach proposed and the fact that the prospective applicant was not proposing to use the 146B process to amend the existing s.37E permission for the Seven Hills Windfarm and grid connection to provide for the alternative grid connection route. The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide clarity in the public notices and application documentation of what is proposed and the need for such an approach given the circumstances outlined by the prospective applicant. The Board representatives also highlighted to the prospective applicant the need to obtain their own advice regarding the most appropriate way to proceed with the project.
- The Board's representatives advised the EIAR must include mitigation factors to avoid impacting Lough Ree and the turloughs.
- The prospective applicant advised that noise surveys and preliminary habitat and mammal surveys have been completed. Preliminary feedback from the ecological team have advised that they don't expect any significant findings. Ornithology surveys found that hooper swans and geese move between turloughs in the winter months. Detailed habitat and mammal surveys will be

carried out and will be fully assessed in the EIAR. The land is mainly agricultural, and bats and badgers are not common in the area.

- The Board's representative asked if the prospective applicant had consulted with the planning authority regarding construction management and the potential impact on the local roads identified as accommodating the grid connection route. The prospective applicant advised that they are currently consulting with Roscommon County Council.
- The Board's representative advised the prospective applicant to have as much certainty as possible before submitting the application and requested that the prospective applicant clarify any amendments to the proposed development in the closure request.

**Conclusion:**

The Board's representatives advised that the onus is on the prospective applicant to either request a further meeting or formal closure of the instant pre-application consultation process. The Board's representatives advised that the record of the instant meeting will be issued in the meantime and that 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.



**Stephen Kay**

**Assistant Director of Planning**