



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-319391-24

Case Reference / Description	Proposed development of 110kV loop in - loop out electricity substation and approximately 8.5km of underground electricity line at Shankill and Ballygorteen, County Kilkenny, and Lacken, Baunreagh and Annagar, County Carlow.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Date	27 th June 2024	Start Time	11:00am
Location	MS Teams	End Time	11:40am

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)

Robert Speer, Senior Planning Inspector

Lauren Murphy, Executive Officer

Representing the Prospective Applicant

James Carville, White Hill Wind Limited

Steph Smart, Gaeltech Energy Services

Simon Carleton, Gaeltech Energy Services

Introduction

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 25th March 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 began the presentation by introducing the proposed development. The prospective development is located in east County Kilkenny and west County Carlow, approximately 14km northeast of Kilkenny City, 3km west of Muine Bheag, Co. Carlow, and 1km northwest of Paulstown, Co. Kilkenny.

The proposed development site is located on the lower slopes of the 'Castlecomer Plateau' with the terrain in this area generally sloping to the east / southeast of the River Barrow. The site of the proposed electricity substation comprises agricultural pasture with mature hedgerows and is located 70m west of the M9 Motorway corridor. The wider landscape is made up of localised pockets of wet grassland and semi-natural woodland and is relatively sparsely populated.

The purpose of the proposed development is to connect the permitted White Hill Wind Farm to the national electricity network. The proposed development is intended to include 2 No. electrical control units located at the permitted White Hill Wind Farm; approximately 8.5km of underground electricity line (33kV) located mainly within private lands (6.3km) and partially along the carriageways of local public roads (2.2km); a 110kV Air-Insulated Switchgear Electricity Substation ('loop-in loop-out' type); and associated site development works. The proposed substation will comprise a hardcore surfaced compound enclosed by security fencing and gates; electrical plant and equipment; 2 No. electrical control buildings; 2 No. interface masts; and a 110kV underground electricity line to facilitate connection to the existing Carlow-Kilkenny 110kV overhead transmission line. The substation will also include a containerised (battery) energy storage system.

The prospective applicant presented a drawing of the site which showed the proposed 110kV underground electricity cable and the location of the permitted White Hill Wind Farm development.

The prospective applicant discussed the site selection process. An extensive site selection process was carried out with multiple sites being subjected to environmental and technical evaluation. The prospective applicant outlined how the location of the proposed substation and the routing of the underground electricity line were selected taking into account the absence of any European designated nature conservation sites, the absence of sensitive fauna and flora, the absence of complex geologies, the absence of particular landscape designations or sensitivities, the avoidance of features of cultural heritage interest, the separation distance to residential dwellings, the ease of access to / from the site, and the proximity of the existing Carlow-Kilkenny 110kV overhead transmission line.

The prospective applicant presented a drawing of the preliminary electricity substation design. This identified the existing overhead line, the proposed site entrance, access track, underground electricity cables and the energy storage system.

The prospective applicant discussed its environmental scoping and how it had consulted with Government departments, relevant prescribed bodies, other authorities and service providers in relation to the proposed development. The prospective applicant discussed its environmental scoping and constraints analysis which considered biodiversity, land and soil, water, landscape, cultural heritage, noise & vibration, and material assets.

The prospective applicant discussed the outcomes / findings of its environmental scoping. No fundamental concerns were expressed by consultees. Given that the underground electricity line is intended to traverse 3 No. watercourses, and as hydrological connectivity with the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation has been identified, a Natura Impact Statement is to be prepared. Due to the presence of areas of wet grassland along the route of the underground electricity line, ornithological surveys were conducted to record any presence of breeding waders. Localised constraints identified have informed the precise siting of the electricity substation - these include existing mature hedgerows, the presence of an archaeological feature, the relative proximity to the M9 motorway, and the relative proximity to high pressure gas lines.

The prospective applicant presented a drawing of a revised design layout for the proposed substation. The reason for the revised layout is due to a slightly different access route being chosen given the proximity of residential dwellings and incorporates a larger buffer at the southern end of the site and relocation of some of the proposed battery storage units.

The prospective applicant concluded the presentation by discussing the proposed next steps. These include the continued evaluation and assessment of the environmental constraints identified and an iterative project design process. The prospective applicant intends to commence public consultation in the near future which will include door to door consultations and the establishment of a project website.

Discussion:

- The Board's representatives began the discussion by raising a query regarding the battery storage element of the proposed development and its intended ownership. The prospective applicant clarified that Eirgrid will have ownership of the substation itself while the developer will retain ownership of the battery storage element and the windfarm infrastructure.
- The Board's representatives gave their preliminary opinion that the proposed substation would likely constitute strategic infrastructure development and thus fall within the scope of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. It was further indicated that the battery storage element of the proposed development may not constitute strategic infrastructure development and thus would require a separate planning application to be made to the local authority. However, it was stated that a final determination on these matters would be a decision for the Board.
- The Board's representatives noted that the proposed route of the grid connection differed from that previously considered in the environmental impact assessment of the White Hill Wind Farm permitted under ABP Ref. No. ABP-315365-22. The prospective applicant advised that it was proposed to prepare an EIAR as part of the planning application for the grid connection which would assess any cumulative impacts with the permitted wind farm.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant of the need to consider Classes 1(a) and 10(dd) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, in screening the proposed development for the purposes of environmental impact assessment. Class 1(a) relates to 'rural restructuring' and particular regard should be had to any removal of field boundaries such as hedgerows. Class 10(dd) pertains to the development of 'private roads which would exceed 2000 metres in length'.

- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant to ensure that it carry out robust environmental studies in relation to the proposed grid connection route.
- The Board's representatives asked the applicant to clarify if the watercourse crossings would require horizontal directional drilling. The prospective applicant stated that one of the proposed crossings would require horizontal directional drilling while the nature of the other two crossings is still being evaluated and is yet to be confirmed.
- The Board's representatives reminded the prospective applicant that the development plans for both Carlow County Council and Kilkenny County Council must be taken into consideration.

The Meeting concluded at 11:40am



Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning