



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting ABP-319398-24

|                                                                                  |                              |                   |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <b>Case Reference / Description</b>                                              | ABP-319398-24                |                   |            |
| <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>                                                                      | 09/05/2024                   | <b>Start Time</b> | 11:00 a.m. |
| <b>Location</b>                                                                  | Virtually                    | <b>End Time</b>   | 11:45 p.m. |

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| <b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>                |
| <b>Staff Members</b>                                |
| Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair) |
| Brendan Coyne, Planning Inspector                   |
| Raymond Muwaniri, Executive Officer                 |

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| <b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>          |
| Declan Owens - Director / Planning Consultant          |
| Conor Foy – CD Consulting Director                     |
| Justin Gilmartin – Director Tuam Energy Park Limited   |
| Barry Walsh – Country Manager Tuam Energy Park Limited |

## Introduction

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 26th of 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:**

Tuam Energy Park Limited (TEPL) is the prospective applicant, and the project will provide the point of connection to the national electricity network for the already approved Tuam Energy Park Solar Farm. The area of the proposed development is 62 hectares in size, on sparsely populated flat lands located in North County Galway, 23km northeast of Galway City and 1.5km south of Tuam. The primary existing land use on site comprises agricultural grassland and pasture, bounded by hedgerows, forestry, and bog. Using the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) soil mapping, it was indicated that the land around the proposed transformer compound consists of peaty gleys and raised bog. The M17 is located to the west of proposed site. A stream and the Clare River are also located to the west and the Grange River is to the south.

The purpose of the proposed development is to connect the permitted solar farm to the national grid and the proposed transformer is proposed to form the connection between the permitted 33KV solar farm infrastructure and the 110KV substation. The proposed development does not require an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). Environmental Scoping is ongoing and includes the environmental constraints analysis process for biodiversity, land and soil, water, noise, and vibrations.

The prospective applicant outlined how the proposed site for the transformer compound was selected in part because of the absence of European designated nature conservation sites, the closest being Lough Corrib 790m to the south. The absence of sensitive flora and fauna, complex geologies, substantial watercourses, and flood risk, also contributed to site selection. The prospective applicant outlined how there are 2 recorded cultural heritage monuments 500m away from the site. It was concluded that no fundamental concerns were identified by the environmental constraints analysis process, and the site lends itself to the successful integration with the existing electrical infrastructure.

The proposed next steps are, continued evaluation and assessment of identified environmental constraints and conclusion of the iterative project design process. The prospective applicant is of the view that the development does not constitute a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID).

The target date for the submission of a planning application is the third quarter of 2024.

## Discussion:

- The Board's representatives clarified that the cable connection between the proposed transformer compound and the existing permitted solar farm infrastructure was proposed to be 33KV. It was also confirmed with the prospective applicant that the transformer compound is proposed to immediately adjoin the boundary of the existing Cloon 110kv substation.
- The Board representatives noted that there have been a number of similar cases of under the fence connections into an existing substation which have been determined by the Board not to constitute SID. They added that their preliminary view is that the proposed development does not constitute SID under Section 182 of the Act, but the final determination on this issue will be made by the Board.
- The Board's representative asked the prospective applicant about the design iterations, and if there was potential for further changes to the proposed connection layout. The prospective applicant replied that this is possible however significant discussions have been undertaken with Eirgrid down to relatively minor aspects of the design and therefore significant changes are not anticipated. The Board's representative advised the prospective applicant that were this situation to change that they should hold off on closing the pre-application process.
- The Board's representative enquired about the two other precedent projects in County Limerick and Longford that were referenced in the presentation made by the prospective applicant. They also asked whether the grid connection cable route linking the permitted Tuam Energy Park Solar Farm to the proposed transformer compound has received planning permission. The prospective applicant provided the reference numbers for the precedent projects (ABP Refs. VC14.312013 and VC91.316369) and confirmed that the grid connection cable route to a point adjacent to the public road to the north of the proposed transformer compound has been approved under the parent permission for the Tuam Energy Park Solar Farm.
- The Board's representatives asked about the nature of a structure indicated in the presentation as being located a short distance to the east of the proposed transformer compound. The prospective applicant clarified that it was a private dwelling which they had the option of acquiring.
- The Board's representative informed the prospective applicant that if they were to request closure that it should be in writing, and that the request should clearly identify and describe any changes to the design presented to the Board up to this point.
- The Prospective Applicant enquired about the timeline pending decision. The Board's representative replied that they could not give a concrete timeline, however once the prospective applicant has received and reviewed the meeting record and submitted a request for closure, then a report on the case would be discharged to the Board for consideration.

**Conclusion:**

The Board's representatives advised that 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.



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**Stephen Kay**

**Assistant Director of Planning**