



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Record of Meeting ABP-320154-24

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	Proposed 220kV Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) tail fed substation with associated grid connection comprising 220kV underground cabling connecting to the existing 220kV Knockraha substation located in the townlands of Rathcobane, Dundullerick East, Dundullerick West, Ballysallagh, Glengaiff More, Ballynaglogh, Ballyvatta, Ballybrannagh West, Aghaduff, Pigeonhill, Ballynanelagh, Kileena, Ballinbrittig and Ballynagaul, County Cork.		
<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> Meeting		
<b>Date</b>	20 August 2024	<b>Start Time</b>	11:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams	<b>End Time</b>	11:25am

### Representing An Bord Pleanála

Una Crosse (Assistant Planning Director) Chair

Maire Daly (Senior Planning Inspector)

Ellen Moss (Executive Officer)

### Representing the Prospective Applicant

Mark McCarthy (Ballysallagh Solar Farm Limited)

## **Introduction**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 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 their presentation by briefly introducing the applicant, Ballysallagh Solar Farm Limited, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) company set up by Terra Solar. Terra Solar was established in 2015 to develop, finance, construct, and operate solar farms in Ireland. To date, Terra Solar has consent for 30 solar farms and over 1000 megawatts of renewable energy in Ireland.

The prospective applicant outlined the need for the proposed development which proposes to serve the proposed Ballysallagh Solar Farm, which will be subject to a future planning application to Cork County Council. The site boundaries and preliminary design for the solar farm are currently being finalised. The solar farm is expected to be spread over three land parcels and have an electrical output of 200 megawatts.

The prospective applicant provided information about the proposed development site and the wider rural area which has a mix of linear and one-off residential developments. The nearest small settlements are Leamlara, 1.3 kilometres from the proposed substation and Knockraha, 1 kilometre to the north of the grid connection route. The closest European designated sites are the Blackwater River Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is 3 kilometres to the north of the proposed development, and the Great Island Channel SAC and Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA), which is 3.5 kilometres to the south. Access to the proposed development includes the R626 regional road, numerous local roads, and the M8 motorway located 4 kilometres to the west.

The prospective applicant described the proposed development, which can be defined as an underground cable from the proposed solar farm connecting to a 220-kilovolt Air-Insulated Substation (AIS) tail-fed substation which would comprise an EirGrid compound and an Independent Power Producer (IPP) or customer-owned

compound. Both compounds would contain control buildings, transformers, and other electrical infrastructure. The proposed substation would connect to the existing 220-kilovolt Knockraha substation via a 220-kilovolt underground cable.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the key national, regional, and local policies relevant to the proposed development. Information was provided regarding planning policy considerations in terms of the National Planning Framework, the Climate Action Plan 2024, Government sectoral emissions ceilings August 2022, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region 2020, and the Cork County Council Development Plan 2022-2028.

The prospective applicant provided information on the legislative considerations of the proposed development and advised that it is their view that the proposed underground cable has a voltage of 220 kilovolts and, therefore, falls within the definition of transmission as set out in section 182A(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The prospective applicant advised that the 220 kilovolt substation constitutes 'electric plant' and also falls within the definition of transmission as set out in section 182A(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

The prospective applicant advised that if the Board confirms that the development falls within the scope of Strategic Infrastructure, the application would be accompanied by a Planning Statement, Archaeological Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment, Traffic Impact Assessment, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Construction Method Statement, Construction Environmental Management Plan, Screening report for Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening report and any other assessments as deemed necessary.

**Discussion:**

The Boards representatives began the meeting by querying the timeline for the application for the proposed solar farm element would be submitted to Cork County Council. The prospective applicant advised that the application should be submitted to Cork County Council in the coming weeks.

The Boards representatives noted that the prospective applicant addressed the context of the site in respect of distances to European designated sites. The Boards representatives noted a number of archaeological features which would be addressed to the proposed screening report for appropriate assessment within.

The Boards representatives noted that the vicinity of the Knockraha substation had been subject of a number of applications and pre-application requests including the permitted Celtic Interconnector. The Boards representatives highlighted the need to address such development and proposals in the consideration of cumulative and in-combination impacts in the respective EIA screening and AA screening.

The prospective applicant advised that it has had a number of consultations with EirGrid over the last six months, who have no objection to the proposal, with the consultations including consideration of potential interfaces with the Celtic Interconnector. If the proposed development is granted permission, the prospective applicant will consult with EirGrid to agree on construction methodologies to ensure that they are satisfied that there would not be any impact on the Interconnector.

Reference was made by the Board representatives to the recent Treascon Supreme Court judgement in respect of the consideration of solar farms in respect of the EIA Directive with the prospective applicant noting the relevant classes for the purposes of EIA and their proposal in respect of EIA screening for any future applications on the subject site and the proposed solar farm.

The prospective applicant asked if a list of prescribed bodies would accompany the record of this meeting. The Board's representatives advised that the list of prescribed bodies to be notified of any future application would be issued with the Board Direction when the pre-application consultation is finalised.

The Board's representatives sought clarification on whether any of the proposed grid connection route would traverse the boundary with Cork City Council. The prospective applicant advised that the boundary is a number of kilometres from the route.

The Board's representatives gave their preliminary opinion that the proposed development falls within the scope of strategic infrastructure but reminded the prospective applicant that it is the Board that will make the decision on the matter.

#### **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.

The Meeting concluded at 11:25.



**Una Crosse**

**Assistant Director of Planning**