



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Recording of Meeting 14.PC0233 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

<b>Case Reference / Description</b>	14.PC0233  Proposed wind farm of 29 wind turbines with an output of 90MW in various townlands in South County Longford.		
<b>Case Type</b>	Pre-application consultation		
<b>1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		
<b>Date</b>	17/11/16	<b>Start Time</b>	11 a.m.
<b>Location</b>	Conference Room	<b>End Time</b>	12.05 p.m.
<b>Chairperson</b>	Anne Marie O'Connor	<b>Executive Officer</b>	Kieran Somers

<b>Attendees</b>		
<b>Representing An Bord Pleanála</b>		
<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Email Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Anne Marie O'Connor, Assistant Director of Planning		
Una Crosse, Senior Planning Inspector		
Diarmuid Collins, Senior Administrative Officer		
Kieran Somers, Executive Officer	k.somers@pleanala.ie	01-8737107

<b>Representing the Prospective Applicant</b>		
Siobhan Tinnelly, Project Manager, Tobin Consulting Engineers		
Stephen Dowds, Planning Advisor, Stephen Dowds Associates		
Michael Gill, Project Manager, Bord na Mona Powergen Ltd		
Sean Creedon, Planning and Environmental Manager, Bord na Mona Powergen Ltd		

The meeting commenced at 11 a.m.

**Introduction:**

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant dated the 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 formally requesting pre-application consultations with the Board.

The Board 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 it wished to receive advice on from the Board.

The Board mentioned general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process as follows:

- 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 Board will serve formal notice at the conclusion of the process as to whether or not the proposed development is SID. It may form a preliminary view at an early stage in the process as to whether the proposed development would likely constitute strategic infrastructure.
- 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 any legal proceedings.

The Board also noted the prospective applicant's preliminary opinion that the proposed development does constitute strategic infrastructure development.

### **Presentation by the prospective applicant:**

The prospective applicant provided a brief background to the project and referenced its overall wind energy programme which it intends to implement over the coming years.

As regards the instant project, the prospective applicant said that this is located within the Moundillon peat production bog group. The site in question is in the ownership of the prospective applicant. It added that there are some small parcels of land within the site used for agriculture and that any rights-of-way through the site to these areas will not be affected by the proposed development. There are also a number of unlicensed (wireless) telecommunication pathways that cross the site used by private operators.

The site consists of three cutover/cutaway bogs – Derryaroge, Derryadd and Lough Bannow. There is currently peat extraction on the site, and a rail line or peat haulage traverses the site. The prospective applicant said that there are no SACs, SPAs or NHAs within the footprint of the site. Nearby settlements include Lanesborough, Derraghan, Keenagh and Killashee. Longford Town is approximately nine kilometres distance from the proposed wind farm location. The River Shannon is also in close proximity. The prospective applicant noted that, at present, there are no operational wind farms in County Longford generally. Nearby wind farms in County Roscommon include Sliabh Bawn and Skrine.

In terms of the selection of the site, the prospective applicant noted that it is located within a preferred area for wind energy development as set out in the current county development plan. The prospective applicant noted that a 110kV line crosses the site and that there is an existing substation in Lanesborough. In terms of a grid connection, the prospective applicant said that applications for a number of grid connection options have been lodged with Eirgrid, but no decision has been made on which option will be pursued.

With regard to the preparation of an EIS to accompany the formal planning application, the prospective applicant said that the preliminary assessment with respect to this is currently being carried out. A detailed constraints map has been prepared in this regard, and studies are being carried out in relation to matters such as land use, aviation, habitats and ecology, peat depth, shadow flicker, visual impact, surface water and grid access. A scoping report has been forwarded to relevant prescribed bodies and consultees.

The prospective applicant said that the initial site layout plan for the proposed development is guiding the baseline studies for the EIS. The final layout plan has to be agreed upon and an interim layout plan is pending.

The prospective applicant summarised the key elements of its public consultation activities to date. These include:

- Public consultation events in January and September 2016
- Site visits to Mountlucas wind farm facilitated
- Establishment of a community engagement forum
- Public advertising/newsletters
- Consultations with prescribed bodies and stakeholders

With regard to the interim site layout plan, the prospective applicant indicated that this might be ready by the end of November 2016. It added that it is unlikely to be greatly different from the initial site layout plan. With respect to the options for the grid connection, the prospective applicant said these would be presented as part of the formal planning application.

The prospective applicant reiterated its view that the proposed development would fall within SID. It is satisfied that the scale of the proposed development fits within the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and that it also satisfied the criteria set out under Section 37A(2). The prospective applicant also noted the proximity of the proposed development site to the boundary with County Roscommon.

### **Matters raised by the Board**

Responding to the Board's query, the prospective applicant confirmed that there is still a certain degree of peat extraction occurring and that the bog in question is an active bog in this regard. It added that this will not be a constraint. There will be no extraction occurring within the footprint of the proposed development. With regard to the site generally, the prospective applicant confirmed that there is an existing IPC licence which it said is open-ended in terms of its duration. The prospective applicant said that it will be taking a view as to whether it will be surrendering this licence in the fullness of time.

The Board's representatives queried the density of population in the vicinity of the proposed development site. The prospective applicant replied that the surrounding area is rural in nature and mostly consists of pastoral farming. With regard to separation distances between turbines and dwellings, the prospective applicant said that it will be seeking to maintain a minimum separation of 650 metres. It added that there is flexibility with respect to the location of turbines and the site layout generally.

The Board enquired as to whether there has been any feedback to date from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The prospective applicant replied that there has been none as of yet.

The Board asked what designated sites exist within the vicinity of the proposed development site. The prospective applicant referred to four in particular, as follows:

- Lough Ree SAC
- Lough Ree SPA
- Mount Jessop Bog NHA
- Fortwilliam Turlough SAC

Noting these, the Board referred in particular to the Fortwilliam Turlough and asked if there is a hydrogeological connection between the site of the proposed development and the turlough. The prospective applicant indicated that it has yet to establish if there is a connection between the two. The Board advised the prospective applicant to be cognisant of this matter in any surveys it carries out and, in particular, to the presence of any karst networks. It also said that any potential impacts on groundwater dependant terrestrial ecosystems and/or groundwater should be examined in detail, in addition to any potential impacts on avian fauna and their habitats. The Board also advised the prospective applicant to make the NPWS aware of the proximity of the turlough in question.

Responding to the Board's query, the prospective applicant said that the proposed development site ultimately drains into the River Shannon. It said that a regime of surface drainage is already in place with respect to the peat excavation on the site. The prospective applicant also added that the footprint of proposed turbines will be laid out so as not to have a significant impact on the existing surface drainage regime.

In response to the Board's question, the prospective applicant advised that bird surveys are on-going, and that data is also available from surveys conducted by Bord na Mona in relation to the peat excavation. Regard is being had to the guidance set out in the Scottish Natural Heritage Guidelines.

The Board's representatives emphasised that all surveys conducted and information gathered generally will need to be as robust as possible in order to demonstrate compliance with the Habitat's Directive. The Board expressed its opinion generally that ecological considerations are likely to be a significance consideration in the assessment of the proposed development.

As part of pre-planning consultations, the Board advised the prospective applicant to add the Office of Public Works (OPW) to its list due to the proximity to the Corlea trackway visitor centre.

**Conclusion:**

The prospective applicant summarised its timeline for the remainder of survey work, completion of EIA baseline data and final preparation of an EIS and an NIS. Its current target for the lodgement of a formal planning application is circa June 2017.

The Board noted this and commented that it would appear that the proposed development will be an SID application to be made directly to it. It said that a further meeting would be required and invited the prospective applicant to request this when it has more survey work done and more substantive feedback received from bodies such as the NPWS.

The prospective applicant indicated that it is likely to request such a further meeting with the Board circa February/March 2017.

The meeting concluded at 12.05 p.m.

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**Anne Marie O'Connor**

**Assistant Director of Planning**