



An
Bord
Pleanála

Recording of Meeting 26.VC0102 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	26.VC0102 Proposed electricity interconnector between Ireland and Wales from Great Island, Co. Wexford.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	08/12/16	Start Time	11 a.m.
Location	Meeting Room 3	End Time	12.30 p.m.
Chairperson	Phillip Green	Executive Officer	Kieran Somers

Attendees		
Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Staff Member	Email Address	Phone
Phillip Green, Assistant Director of Planning		
Una Crosse, Senior Planning Inspector		
Marcella Doyle, Senior Executive Officer		
Kieran Somers, Executive Officer	k.somers@pleanala.ie	01-8737107

Representing the Prospective Applicant		
Michael Daly, Lead Project Consultant, Arup		
Tom Brinicombe, Project Manager, Element Power		
Clodagh O'Donovan, Project Permitting/Consenting Lead, Arup		

The meeting commenced at 11a.m.

Introduction:

The Board referred to the letter dated the 10th November, 2016 from the prospective applicant requesting pre-application consultations 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 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 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 any legal proceedings.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

An introduction was provided by the prospective applicant generally in relation to the company and the instant project. The proposed development is to provide an electricity interconnector between Great Island in County Wexford and Pembroke in Pembrokeshire in Wales. This will provide for power flows going both ways between Ireland and Wales. The prospective applicant set out the constituent elements of the proposed development which include a cable route of approximately 172 kilometres in length and a converter station. With respect to the proposed converter station, the prospective applicant said that this would be contained within a compound adjacent to the existing substation. Responding to the Board's query about the proposed height of this (22 metres), the prospective applicant said that the height of the towers determines the height of the structure; however, it added that the indicative height and dimensions are likely to reduce as the design is progressed.

The prospective applicant set out the chief benefits of the proposed development as follows:

- Strategically placed to reinforce the South of Ireland by way of connection to Wales
- Will provide reinforcement to transmission boundaries in South Wales
- Will provide additional import and export capacity for Ireland
- Will provide greater market integration
- Will facilitate greater sharing of reserve, generation capacity and ancillary services between the two countries
- Will reduce carbon emissions

The current status of the project was also set out by the prospective applicant with respect to matters such as PCI, CEF, Ofgem, connection agreement in Wales, the Eirgrid application queue and on-going CER consultations. In this latter respect, the prospective applicant noted that the CER's role is to establish a regulatory framework in terms of facilitating such interconnection between countries. The prospective applicant added that sub-sea surveys cannot be furthered until such clarity is provided by the CER.

With respect to the proposed development in Wales, the prospective applicant reported that consultations are on-going with bodies such as National Resource Wales, Pembrokeshire County Council and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Discussions with relevant landowners have also commenced. The proposed development in Wales will consist of a 6.7-kilometre cable route and a converter station in close proximity to the existing Pembroke substation. Screening and scoping processes are also on-going and the prospective applicant said that the emerging opinion is that the proposed development here will not require the production of an EIS. It added that further surveying work and assessment is required in respect of the foreshore element in Wales, particularly with regard to the nearby Castlemartin Firing Range.

In terms of landside development in Ireland, the prospective applicant reported that a foreshore licence survey application was submitted in October 2016. This will be for a duration of two years. It also advised that a consultation meeting has taken place with the Port of Waterford.

With regard to potential landfall sites, the prospective applicant said that there are two emerging preferred locations in County Wexford: Boyce's Bay and Baginbun Beach. The emerging preferred onshore cable route has also been identified, as well as an emerging preferred converter station site. Consultations have commenced with a number of bodies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Foreshore Unit in the Department and Wexford County Council. Landowner discussions have also been initiated. Discussions with the relevant local authority have included such matters as road opening licences with respect to the preferred cable route. It is envisaged that this route will predominantly follow the public road. Responding to the Board's query on this, the prospective applicant said that the route in question is sparsely populated and does not traverse any major settlements. Noting this, the Board emphasised to the prospective applicant the importance and benefit of robust public consultations.

The prospective applicant set out its current timeline in respect of the project generally. The intention at present is to lodge the formal planning application prior to the end of 2017.

Referring to the next stages in the process, the prospective applicant reiterated its opinion that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure development.

Board comments/queries:

The Board enquired as to whether the NPWS had any significant comments to make on the proposed development to date, particularly the emerging preferred landfall sites. The prospective applicant replied that the NPWS had generally raised matters which they would wish to have considered in connection with this element of the project. It said that the NPWS prefer the option of directional drilling as opposed to open trenches, and would wish for both rock dumping and blankets to be kept to a minimum. With regard to their discussions with the Port of Waterford, the prospective applicant said that this body has expressed a preference for the cable route to come into the coast as close as possible. The prospective applicant remarked that, having regard to this request, Baginbun Beach may be the more likely of the two landfall options to be selected.

Responding to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that the CER's determination of an appropriate regulatory framework will not have a bearing on planning matters.

The Board also asked the prospective applicant how Brexit might potentially impact on the project. The prospective applicant replied that it is getting more clarity on this matter. It said that interconnection generally is still seen as an important part of the overall energy union and remarked that there are examples of such infrastructure traversing boundaries between member and non-member states and that the PCI Regulations make reference to this.

The Board's representatives referred to Eirgrid's plans to construct an interconnector between Ireland and France in the future. The prospective applicant said that, although information is being shared in this regard, it does not know if this proposed project has been progressed to landfall selection stage. Responding to the Board's query, the prospective applicant said it thought it highly unlikely that both interconnectors would utilise the same landfall location.

The Board's representatives noted that, in the absence of definite locations and specific routes at present, its role in imparting advice is somewhat restricted. It noted generally that it has provision under the legislation to meet with relevant prescribed bodies and indicated its intention to do so as the instant pre-app case moves forward. The prospective applicant for its part noted that the scoping document will be prepared and circulated to relevant bodies and stakeholders early in 2017. It added that plans and particulars with regard to the proposed development, such as the preferred emerging cable route, will become more precise as they are advanced.

The Board asked the prospective applicant if there is any specific advice it requires at this point in time. The prospective applicant asked the Board if the proposed development would be SID. The Board said that this would be its preliminary opinion.

In relation to an EIS for the project on the Irish landside, the Board's representatives said that the Board would have to come to an opinion on this. At present, the prospective applicant does not believe an EIS is required. It agreed that, in the absence of an EIS, an environmental report would be required. The Board noted that in the case of the East-West Interconnector (case reference number VA0002) a comprehensive environmental report (both land and marine) was furnished as part of the planning application.

With respect to AA screening, the prospective applicant advised the Board that this is currently being finalised. The scoping report in relation to the project is due to be completed in early 2017.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that the prospective applicant will forward to the Board either the draft scoping report or a more informal further information document circa January 2017. The Board said that this would facilitate its understanding of the project and that it would arrange a further meeting with the prospective applicant thereafter. The Board noted that the proposed development will have transboundary implications in respect of the UK (Wales) and requested the prospective applicant to furnish it with contact details in this regard.

Responding to the Board's query, the prospective applicant confirmed that the proposed development is for a stand-alone interconnector and is not related to any wind energy developments.

The prospective applicant enquired as to whether there has been any meaningful progress with regard to pending foreshore legislation. The Board replied that there would not appear to be any imminent progress at the present time.

With respect to the aforementioned East-West Interconnector case (VA0002), the Board's representatives noted that the Board had come to an opinion that its jurisdiction in respect of the proposed development extended some 12 nautical miles.

The Board asked the prospective applicant if any of the other consents it is seeking require the preparation of an EIS. The prospective applicant replied that they do not. It added that, in any event, cumulative impacts will be assessed as part of any formal planning application.

Finally, it was agreed that the prospective applicant will revert to the Board circa January 2017 with either the draft scoping report or an informal further information document. A further meeting between the prospective applicant and Board may then be arranged.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.

Phillip Green

Assistant Director of Planning