



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 306330-20

Development:	Construction of a 110kV substation to facilitate the connection of a proposed solar farm to the national grid.
Location:	Garballagh and Commons, Duleek. Co Meath.
Planning Authority:	Meath Co. Council
Applicant:	Highfield Solar Ltd.
Date of Site Inspection:	February 18 th , 2020.
Inspector:	Breda Gannon

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. On January 7th, 2020, a request was received by An Bord Pleanála to enter into pre-application discussions with respect to the proposed development under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act, as amended.
- 1.2. The Board's representatives met with the prospective applicant on March 10th, 2020.
- 1.3. The prospective applicant formally requested closure of the pre-application consultation process in correspondence received on April 16th, 2020.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. The site is located c 1.5km southwest of Duleek Co. Meath. It is located on the south side of the R150 that connects Duleek with the N2 to the west. The area is one of undulating rural countryside consisting of large agricultural fields defined by hedgerows. There is some ribbon development along the roadway, with a cluster of houses located on the opposite side of the road to the north. The site is accessed via an existing farm roadway located off the regional road. The existing Drybridge-Baltrasna 110 kV line runs in a north-south direction to the east of the site.

3.0 Proposed Development

The proposal is to construct a 110 kV substation to facilitate the connection of a proposed solar farm development to the transmission network. The overall compound would have an area of c 8,500m² and include separate Eirgrid and IPP compounds. The buildings and other externally mounded electrical plant would be enclosed in a fenced compound. These compounds would include a Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) station and IPP Control Building. It would also include underground ducting and cabling. A separate 110kV electrical transformer and electrical plant would lie in the IPP Compound.

The proposed infrastructure would also include 2 no. Steel Lattice Towers under the existing 110 kV line. Underground cabling totalling extending approximately 2.1 km from these towers to the substation is also included in the proposed works.

4.0 Prospective Applicants Submission to the Board

- 4.1. The proposed development consists of 110kV electric plant, transformer, substation, end masts and cables. The infrastructure is required to facilitate the connection of the proposed Gaskinstown Solar Farm to the transmission network.
- 4.2. The sub-station will be connected directly to the Drybridge-Baltrasna 110kV line by way of a looped in/out connection.
- 4.3. The applicant refers to recent decisions for similar development consisting of lopped-in 110kV substations to facilitate the connection of a solar farm to the national grid which have been determined as Strategic Infrastructure. The applicant is of the opinion that the proposed development, which is similar, is therefore Strategic Infrastructure.
- 4.4. The proposed development qualifies under the definition of 'Transmission' as detailed in section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 and accordingly is deemed to be Strategic Infrastructure.

5.0 Strategic Infrastructure – Legal Provisions

- 5.1. Under section 182A (1) of the 2000 Act (inserted by section 4 of the 2006 Act) where a person, (the 'undertaker') intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, (hereafter referred to in this section and section 182B as 'proposed development'), the undertaker shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, an application for approval of development under section 182B and shall apply to the Board for such approval accordingly.
- 5.2. Subsection 9 states that in this section *'transmission' in relation to electricity, shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 but, for the purposes of this section, the foregoing expression, in relation to electricity, shall also be construed as meaning the transport of electricity by means of*
 - (a) a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110 kilovolts or more, or
 - (b) an interconnector, whether ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not.

The following definitions, as set out in section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, as amended, are noted:

“Transmission” is defined as:

‘the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system, that is to say a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Board may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system but shall include any interconnector owned by the Board’.

“Distribution” is defined as:

“The transport of electricity by means of a distribution system, that is to say, a system which consists of electric lines, electric plant, transformers and switch gear and which is used for conveying electricity to final customers.

“Electric plant” is defined as:

“any plant, apparatus or appliance used for, or for the purposes connected with, the generation, transmission, distribution or supply of electricity other than –

- (a) An electric line
- (b) A meter used for ascertaining the quantity of electricity supplied to any premises, or
- (c) An electrical appliance under the control of the consumer.

6.0 **Assessment**

The proposed development comprises a new substation and cable connection to the Drybridge-Baltrasna 110Kv overhead line. It lies to the east of a large site (81ha) on which the prospective applicant proposes to seek permission for a solar farm from Meath Co Council. Electricity generated by a proposed solar farm will be fed into the

substation. It is considered that the substation constitutes 'electrical plant' as defined above in that it is plant for the conveying of electricity from a generating station to a substation and/or facilitating connection to the national grid from an existing overhead line. Section 182A(9) of the Act sets a threshold of 110kV in order for a high voltage electricity line to be considered strategic infrastructure. No threshold is set in respect of a substation.

The new substation and loop-in infrastructure will enable the electricity generated by the proposed solar farm to be stepped up to a voltage of 110 kV for direct transmission to the national grid. The electric power of the overall existing circuit will be entirely diverted into the substation and back out again. The new substation and associated underground cable will therefore form part of the existing transmission system and comprise a new node on the transmission grid.

The proposal is similar to other proposals put before the Board for pre-application consultation under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. In these cases the Board determined that the provision of a new 110kV substation and associated overground/underground cabling which is to be looped into the existing transmission system constitutes strategic infrastructure. The cases are as follows:

- VC0111: Rosspile Co. Wexford.
- ABP-300167-17: Dunboyne Co Meath.
- ABP-301646-18 –Harristown Co. Meath.
- ABP-302247-18: Ballylaneen. Co Waterford.
- ABP-302516-18: Listowel. Co. Kerry.

7.0 Planning and environmental considerations

The following matters were discussed at the pre-application meeting:

- Sight visibility at site access.
- Flooding.
- Cultural heritage.

- Visual impact.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1. I consider that the proposed development as described in the submission and drawings constitutes strategic infrastructure coming within the scope of section 182(A) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, necessitating an application directly to the Board.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1. I recommend that Highfield Solar Ltd be informed that the proposed development consisting of a 110kV substation and associated loop-in infrastructure to tie into the existing 110kV overhead transmission line at Garballagh and Commons townlands Duleek. Co Meath as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála on the 7th January, 2020 falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, and that a planning application should be made directly to the Board.

Breda Gannon
Senior Planning Inspector

17th April, 2020

Appendix 1

The following is a schedule of prescribed bodies considered relevant in this instance for the purposes of Section 182A(4)(b) of the Act.

Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Meath Co. Council

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Failte Ireland

An Tásice

Heritage Council

Commission of Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy

Health Service Executive