



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 310141-21

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Development | Construction of a 110kV electricity substation and all associated works at Shantallow Solar Farm. |
| Location | Shantallow and Moyveela Townlands. Co. Galway. |
| Planning Authority | Galway Co. Council |
| Applicant(s) | Shantallow Solar Farm Ltd. |
| Type of Application | Section 182A (1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. |
| Prescribed Bodies | Transport Infrastructure Ireland. |
| Observer(s) | None. |
| Date of Site Inspection | October 14th, 2021. |
| Inspector | Breda Gannon |

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1.0 Introduction | 3 |
| 2.0 Site Location and Description | 3 |
| 3.0 Proposed Development | 3 |
| 4.0 Consultations | 5 |
| 5.0 Submissions | 5 |
| 6.0 Planning History..... | 7 |
| 7.0 Policy Context..... | 8 |
| 8.0 Assessment | 11 |
| 9.0 Recommendation..... | 22 |
| 10.0 Reasons and Considerations (Draft Order) | 22 |
| 11.0 Conditions | 23 |

1.0 Introduction

An application under the provisions of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, was received by An Bord Pleanála from Shantallow Solar Farm Ltd for the development of a 110kV substation and associated infrastructure. The proposed substation would serve a solar farm which was permitted under an application made to Galway Co Council (17/1544). The permitted development included a 110kV substation with a loop in to the existing 110kV overhead line that crosses the site. The current application arises as a result of minor design revisions, primarily as a result of changes to the EirGrid Grid Code Standards in the intervening period.

Following pre-application consultation, the Board determined (ABP 308436-20) that the proposed development falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and that the application should be made directly to the Board.

2.0 Site Location and Description

The site is located c.5km east of Oranmore and c.6km southwest of the town of Athenry in Co. Galway. The M18 motorway lies c. 1km to the west and the M6 lies approximately 3km to the north. The site, which has a stated area of c 16.2 ha, is generally flat and consists of a number of agricultural fields enclosed by low stone walls/hedgerows and fencing. There is access to the site off the R446 and by local access tracks. The site is traversed by an existing 110kV electricity line.

The area is rural in character and the pattern of development is dispersed consisting of individual dwellings and farm holdings with ribbon development along the local road network. There is a small cluster of residences to the north of the site.

3.0 Proposed Development

The development as described in the public notices submitted with the application proposes the following:

- Electrical substation consisting of a 110kV compound (c 7245m²) and a 33kV compound (c.1853m²) with associated electrical plant, electrical equipment, control buildings, lighting masts and security fencing.
- Underground cable (110kV) installations linking the substation to 2 no. proposed towers (c16.1m in height) at the existing overhead 110kV transmission line; and
- All associated development works including ancillary site clearance, regrading, provision of areas of hardstanding, internal access roads and on site drainage and site services works.

The proposed substation would facilitate the export of renewable electricity generated by the permitted Shantallow Solar Farm to the national electricity grid.

The substation would 'loop in' via underground cable to the existing overhead power line that crosses the site.

The application is supported by a Planning and Environmental Considerations Report which contains 5 no. appendices:

- Appendix A - Board Direction
- Appendix B – Appropriate Assessment Screening Report
- Appendix C - Ecology Report
- Appendix D - Drainage Calculations
- Appendix E - Documents and drawings for consented solar farm development (17/1544).

The proposed substation would remain in the same location as previously approved (17/1544). Details of the proposed revisions to the permitted substation are provided in the drawings submitted and are summarised below:

- Relocation of the EirGrid control building - the control building is shifted towards the substation road and away from the busbar to achieve a 7.8m clearance from the busbar.
- Slight enlargement of the EirGrid compound from 66.5m x 101m to 69.9m x 103.5m.

- Diesel generator plinth and diesel tank bund structure have been relocated from next to the compound gates to beside the control building.
- The 12m high busbar flyover coupler bay and associated gantries which were located on the left most bay on the busbar has been replaced with a low-level coupler bay which is at the same height as the busbar itself (7m).
- The bay connections to the busbar's have been rearranged.
- Lightning monopoles have been rearranged to allow for the new busbar arrangement.

4.0 Consultations

Details of the application were circulated to the following prescribed bodies:

- Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland.
- Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy.
- Irish Water.

A response was received from Transport Infrastructure Ireland which is summarised below.

5.0 Submissions

Prescribed Bodies

Transport Infrastructure Ireland notes the requirement for a permit for the transport of abnormal loads from each local authority through whose jurisdiction the loads will travel. All structures on the proposed haul roads must be checked by the developer to confirm their capacity to accommodate any abnormal load.

The applicant should consult with all PPC Companies, MMarC Contractors and road authorities over which the haul route traverses to ascertain the operational

requirements such as delivery timetabling etc and to ensure that the strategic function of the national road network is safeguarded.

TII recommends resolution of these matters in advance of any decision on the application where abnormal loads are a feature of the development proposals.

Any damage caused to the pavement of the national road shall be rectified in accordance with TII Pavement Standards and details in this regard shall be agreed with the Road Authority prior to the commencement of any development on the site.

Public Submissions

No submissions were received from the public.

Planning Authority Submission

The planning authority submission notes that the application involves revisions to the substation on a generally similar development footprint as that proposed under the existing permission. The submission provides a summary of national, regional and local policy, which supports renewable energy development in suitable locations.

Specific comments were made in relation to the following:

Archaeological heritage – it appears that the site is not within the zone of archaeological potential of any known recorded monument. The previous application included an archaeological assessment which recommended a programme of pre-development testing to protect any unrecorded archaeology on the site. This was not included as a condition of the permission. The Board may wish to consider such a condition to protect any unknown archaeological remains that may exist on the site.

Flood risk – the proposed development is not within a known fluvial risk zone. There are areas of the centre of the site which may be prone to pluvial flood risk. The Planning Report (Section 6.2) states that none of the changes to the proposed substation will impact on the conclusions of the previously submitted Flood Risk Assessment. The substation remains in Flood Zone C and would be appropriate development under the provisions of the current Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

Landscape and Visual impact – the site is located within a ‘low’ sensitivity landscape with a ‘low’ value rating. The proposal would have benefitted from a visual impact assessment, (including an update to the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a series of photomontages from appropriate vantage points submitted with

Planning Ref 17/1544). It would also have benefitted from the provision of typical elevations of the proposed infrastructure from specified orientations.

In general, and given the relatively minor variations between the development permitted and the current proposals, it is considered that the proposed development is not a scheme that has been altered so significantly as to alter the opinion of the planning authority in relation to the visual impact of the proposed development in the landscape.

Roads & Transportation – the proposal does not appear to involve any material change to the entrance arrangements approved by Galway Co. Council under Planning Ref 17/1544.

Environmental Impact Assessment – There is no mandatory requirement for EIA. Having regard to the content of Schedule 5, Part 2 Item 15, the Board may consider it appropriate to carry out further screening for sub-threshold EIA.

Proper planning and Development –Based on the above analysis it is considered that the proposed development would not be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Community Gain Conditions – The planning authority did not levy community gain conditions under Planning Ref 17/1544, which included an electrical substation and associated infrastructure.

Development contributions – a development contribution was levied under Planning Ref No 17/1544 on the basis of €10,000 per megawatt installed. There was no separate levy for the permitted substation and associated infrastructure and the current Development Contribution Scheme does not make provision for such levies.

6.0 Planning History

Reg Ref No 17/1544 - Galway Co Council granted planning permission for a solar farm to export up to 35 MW of electricity to the national grid. The permission included a 110kV substation on the site with 'loop in' to the existing 110kV line crossing the site and 2 no. new 110kV end mast towers, approximately 19.5m in height. Following the grant of permission, revisions were required to the substation and the applicant entered into pre-application consultations with the Board.

ABP-308436-20 -The Board determined that the proposed substation development constituted Strategic Infrastructure Development and that the application should be made directly to the Board under section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

7.0 Policy Context

Climate Action Plan 2021

The recently adopted plan commits Ireland to a legally binding target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with a 51% reduction by 2030. The plan sets out indicative ranges of emissions reductions for each sector of the economy by 2030. Among the most critical measures in the plan is to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030, including a mix of offshore/onshore wind and solar PV.

National Planning Framework -Project Ireland 2040

The *National Planning Framework-Project Ireland 2040* (NFP) provides policies, actions and investment to deliver 10 National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) and priorities of the National Development Plan. National Strategic Outcome (NSO 8) 'Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society' is the main NSO that pertains to the proposed development. It recognises a need to;

Reinforce the distribution and transmission network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of a more renewables focused source of energy across the major demand centres.

Chapter 9 of the NPF: 'Realising Our Sustainable Future' recognises the need to accelerate action on climate change for a low carbon energy future. In this regard, National Policy Objective 54 seeks to "*reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.*"

The transition to renewable sources of energy is an integral part of Ireland's climate change strategy as a means of reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Reflecting this,

National Policy Objective 55 will “*promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050.*”

Regional Guidelines

The principal purpose of the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032* is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the economic policies and objectives of Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the region. It seeks to determine at a regional scale how best to achieve the shared goals set out in the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF

Section 8.2 considers the electrical grid network and states:

‘Developing the grid will enable the transmission system to safely accommodate more diverse power flows from surplus regional generation also to facilitate future growth in electricity demand. These developments will strengthen the network for all electricity users, and in doing so will improve the security and quality of supply. This is particularly important if the region is to attract high technology industries that depend on a reliable, high quality, electricity supply’.

The guidelines contain a number of policies which seek to support the development, reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity network, the transition towards a low carbon economy and the transfer of electricity from renewable energy development (RPO 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4).

Regional Policy Objectives RPO 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18 relate to facilitating increased amounts of renewable energy on the grid. Objective RPO 4.17 encourages the development of the transmission and distribution grids to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects and the effective utilisation of the energy generated from renewable sources.

Development Plan

The operative development plan is the **Galway County Council Development Plan 2015-2021**. The plan (Chapter 7) recognises the necessity of having high quality energy and communications infrastructure in order for Galway to progress

economically and socially. It supports reduced dependency on fossil fuels and the role of renewables in energy production.

Relevant policies/objectives include:

Policy ER 2 – The Council shall support proposals for renewable energy development at appropriate scales (including, ocean energy/wave and tidal technologies and ancillary facilities including associated grid connection) at appropriate locations within the County having regard to residential amenities, biodiversity and landscape sensitivities, where such proposals are in compliance with the County Development Plan 2015-2021 and the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

Policy ER 3 – Facilitate the strategic goal of effective balanced regional development through the implementation of policies that will deliver reliable and effective energy networks and electricity grid for the West Region including County Galway, minimising environmental impact by:

- a) Promoting and supporting the provision of secure and efficient energy supply and storage including electricity, gas and renewable energy including wind, wave/tidal, solar, bio-energy and heat energy distribution.
- b) Supporting infrastructural renewal, strengthening and development of strategic electricity networks within the County, as provided for under EirGrid's Grid 25 Strategy, including EirGrid's Grid West Project.
- c) Facilitating the extension of a natural gas distribution network to serve both the County and West Region.

Objective ER 1 – Support the development and expansion of infrastructure for the generation, storage, transmission and distribution of electricity, renewable energy and other renewable energy proposals in suitable locations in County Galway.

Objective ER 2 – Support and facilitate the sustainable development and use of appropriate renewable energy resources and associated infrastructure within the County including solar energy .

8.0 **Assessment**

8.1. **Introduction**

The assessment considers the following:

- Principle of the development
- Environmental considerations
- Appropriate Assessment

8.2. **Principle of the Development**

The principle of the development on this site has been established by the permitted solar farm development granted by Galway Co Council (17/1544), which included a substation on the development site. The current application is required to address minor design amendments to the permitted substation, due to updated EirGrid design standards.

In terms of tackling climate change, reducing dependency on fossil fuels in energy production and achieving reduced greenhouse gas emissions, there is clear policy support at international, national and local level for renewable energy development, including solar energy.

The proposed development would facilitate the construction of the consented Shantallow Solar Farm, which when operational would export renewable energy to the national grid via the proposed grid connection. The proposal therefore supports the transition to renewable sources of energy and will accelerate action on climate change in accordance with relevant policies and objectives at E.U, national, regional and local level.

I accept that the proposed development is acceptable in principle in this location. It is located within a large agricultural holding and is set back from the public road and from residential properties. It would be adjacent to the permitted solar farm and to the existing electricity transmission line and the site is not subject to any specific constraints in terms of land use zoning objectives, landscape designations or archaeological, architectural or cultural heritage.

8.3. Environmental Considerations

Requirement for EIA

Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended sets out types of projects, where they comprise a certain class of development, or exceed certain thresholds are subject to mandatory EIA.

The proposed development comprising an electricity substation is not, of itself, a class of development listed in Schedule 5 as requiring EIA. Furthermore, the proposed substation is part of an overall development which itself was not subject to EIA.

As no element of the proposed development falls into a class of development contained in Schedule 5, Parts 1 or 2, I accept the applicant's position that EIA is not required in respect of the subject development.

The main environmental considerations identified by the applicant which are likely to arise as a result of the substation proposal are considered below.

Ecology

The Ecological Report submitted with the application (Appendix C) provides an ecological description and conservation evaluation of the site. The primary habitat is improved agricultural grassland (which has been intensively grazed) with poorly managed hedgerows. These habitats are rated as of Local Importance (low value).

A remnant area of calcareous grassland occurs within the western area of the site which has been heavily grazed (rated Local Importance, low-high value). There is a larger area of calcareous grassland that is rated of National Importance as it supports viable areas of the Annex 1 Habitat '*Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates*' outside the site. This area will not be affected by the proposed development.

The site has been assessed by the planning authority as suitable for the solar farm development including a substation in this location. I note that the main ecological sensitivity is not part of the substation site. The habitats present are common and widespread in the locality and any fauna/birds disturbed/displaced as a result of the proposal would find refuge in the abundance of similar habitat close to the site.

Having regard to the foregoing, I accept that the development of the substation will not result in significant adverse effects on the ecology of the site.

Flooding/Surface water drainage

A Flood Risk Assessment was submitted with the original application for the solar farm, which included a substation. The site of the substation remains unchanged and the minor amendments within the footprint will not alter the previous conclusions of the assessment.

Some minor changes are proposed to the surface water system within the substation site. Two new electrical bunds surrounding two diesel generators and house transformers are proposed. It is intended that surface water generated in the bunds will be discharged into an attenuation tank via an oil separator to ensure that only uncontaminated water enters the site drainage network.

The attenuation tank has been resized to cater for the new impermeable areas (Appendix D). Attenuation will be achieved by the installation of a proprietary underground attenuation tank as provided for in the original application. It is intended to leave the base of the tank pervious to the underlying ground allowing soakage into the ground through filtration prior to discharge. This will reduce discharge volumes to a local water ditch and provide the potential to recharge the water table. I note that similar arrangements were proposed in the original application and considered acceptable by the planning authority.

Cultural heritage

The potential archaeological impact of the proposed solar farm (including the substation site) was assessed as part of the previous application. Archaeological remains were identified in the wider vicinity, but not within the application site.

The previous application recommended a programme of pre-development testing to protect any previously unrecorded archaeology on the site. This was not included as a condition of the permission. The applicant has indicated a willingness to accept such a condition if required by the Board. Subject to the imposition of such a condition, I consider that potential impacts on the archaeological resource will be adequately addressed.

Traffic and Transport

I note from the Traffic & Transport Assessment submitted with the original application that it is anticipated that the construction of the substation would run concurrently with the development of the overall solar farm. The greatest impacts would be associated with the construction stage, with the operational stage generating on average 2-4 vehicles per month.

Construction traffic for the entire development would be accommodated in a new temporary access of the R446 at the front of the site and will be decommissioned following completion. The access would be provided with sightlines which exceed development plan requirements and is designed to ensure safe access to and from the site. An existing field access to the north would be upgraded to accommodate vehicles during the operational stage of the development.

The traffic implications associated with the construction stage of the proposed substation has been assessed as part of the overall solar farm development. The amendments to the layout are minor in nature and scale and will not create additional traffic impacts over and above those assessed in the original application and considered acceptable by Galway Co Council. I consider that the proposed development is satisfactory in terms of traffic safety and convenience.

Landscape and Visual

The proposal will introduce a large industrial type complex into an area of rural landscape. Unlike the solar panels, the substation will contain sizeable industrial electrical components and a control compound. In addition to this, 2 no. lattice towers will be provided within the site on the alignment of the 110kV transmission line.

The proposed substation will incorporate vertical elements which are more difficult to assimilate. However, the development will take place in an area of 'Low' Landscape Value' and 'Low Sensitivity' which has the ability to accommodate a wider range of development. I note that there are no designated views or routes within 5km of the site.

The landscape and visual effects of the entire solar farm, including the substation site were assessed by the planning authority. The minor alterations proposed will not create significant additional impacts above those already assessed and I do not

consider that there is a requirement for additional photomontages. I consider the impact will be mitigated to a degree by the set-back position of the substation coupled with the planting programme proposed around the perimeter of the substation (Landscaping Masterplan -DWG No. LMP01)

Residential Amenity

The proposed substation would be located c 350m from the nearest residential properties, which is the cluster of dwellings to the north. Excavation works will be required for the construction of the substation foundations, with the potential to create noise and dust.

Having regard to the separation distance to these dwellings, the temporary nature of the construction phase and subject to controls on the hours of construction and normal measures to mitigate noise and dust during construction, significant effects on adjacent sensitive receptors are not likely to arise.

Having regard to the separation distance between the substation site and nearby residents and the low levels of noise generated by operational substations, no long term significant effects on residual amenity are likely to occur.

Conclusion on environmental considerations

I accept that the development of the substation as proposed will not result in significant adverse effects on the environment and is therefore considered acceptable.

8.4. Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive deals with the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union. Article 6(3) of this Directive requires that any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The competent authority must be satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site.

The proposed development is not directly connected to or necessary for the management of any European site and is therefore subject to the provisions of Article 6(3) and Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.

The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to screening the need for appropriate assessment of a project under XAB, section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended are considered fully in this section of the report.

Stage 1-Screening for Appropriate Assessment

The first test of Article 6(3) is to establish if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects to a European site. This is considered Stage 1 of the appropriate assessment process i.e., screening. The screening stage is intended to be a preliminary examination. If the possibility of significant effects cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information, without extensive investigation or the application of mitigation, a plan or project should be considered to have a likely significant effect and Appropriate Assessment carried out.

The applicant carried out an appropriate assessment screening exercise, which is contained in the Report for AA Screening (March 2021) prepared by BioShere Environmental Services. The screening report identifies 11 no. European sites (8 no SAC's and 3 No. SPA's) within the zone of influence (15km) of the proposed development. The sites, their qualifying interest, the distance from the development site and potential linkages are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: European Sites considered for Stage 1 Screening

| European site (SAC/SPA) | Qualifying Interests | Distance from site (km) and summary of linkages |
|--|--|--|
| Ardrahan Grassland SAC (Site code 002244) | Alpine and Subalpine Heaths Juniper Scrub Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland* Limestone Pavement* | 9.56 No hydrological linkages |
| Castletaylor Complex SAC (Site code 000242) | Turloughs Alpine and Boreal Heaths | 7.45 No hydrological linkages |

| European site (SAC/SPA) | Qualifying Interests | Distance from site (km) and summary of linkages |
|--|---|---|
| | Juniper Scrub Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland* Limestone Pavement * | |
| Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site code 000268) | Tidal mudflats and sandflats Coastal Lagoons* Large Shallow Inlets and Bays Reefs Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts <i>Salornica</i> Mud Atlantic Salt Meadows Mediterranean Salt Meadows Turloughs* Juniper Scrub Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland* Cladium Fens* Alkaline Fens Limestone Pavement* Otter Common Harbour Seal | 3.52. The site drains to the Clarinbridge River (c 1.8km) to the south and ultimately into Galway Bay. A theoretical hydrological linkage exists between the development site and the SAC. |
| Lough Corrib SAC (Site code :000297) | Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals Oligotrophic to Mesotrophic Standing Waters Hard Water Lakes Floating River Vegetation Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland* <i>Molinia</i> Meadows | 7.99 No hydrological linkages |

| European site (SAC/SPA) | Qualifying Interests | Distance from site (km) and summary of linkages |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>Raised Bog (Active) Degraded Raised Bog Rhynchosporion Vegetation Cladium Fens* Petrifying Springs* Alkaline Fens Limestone Pavement* Old Oak Woodland Bog Woodland* Freshwater Pearl Mussel White-clawed Crayfish Sea Lamprey Brook Lamprey Atlantic Samon Lesser Horeshoe Bat Otter Slender Green Feather-moss Slender Naiad.</p> | |
| <p>Lough Fingall Complex SAC (Site code 000606)</p> | <p>Turloughs Alpine and Subalpine Heaths Juniper Scrub Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland* <i>Cladium Fens*</i> Limestone Pavement * Lesser Horseshoe Bat</p> | <p>8.23 No hydrological linkages</p> |
| <p>Kiltiernan Turlough SAC (Site code: 001285)</p> | <p>Turloughs*</p> | <p>8.93 No hydrological linkages</p> |
| <p>Monivea Bog SAC (Site code 002352)</p> | <p>Raised Bog (Active)* Degraded Raised Bog Rhynchosporion Vegetation</p> | <p>13.36 No hydrological linkages</p> |
| <p>Rahasane Turlough SAC (Site code:000322)</p> | <p>Turlough</p> | <p>4.79 No hydrological linkages</p> |

| European site (SAC/SPA) | Qualifying Interests | Distance from site (km) and summary of linkages |
|---|---|--|
| Cregganna Marsh SPA (Site code:004142) | Greenland White-fronted Goose | 4.29 No hydrological linkages |
| Rahasane Turlough SPA (Site code 004089) | Whooper Swan Widgeon Golden Plover Black-tailed Godwit Greenland White-fronted Goose Wetlands and Waterbirds | 5.0 No hydrological linkages. |
| Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site code:004031) | Great Northern Diver Cormorant Grey Heron Light-bellied Brent Goose Widgeon Teal Shoveler Red-breasted | 4.72 The site drains to the Clarinbridge River (c 1.8km) to the south and ultimately into Galway Bay. A theoretical hydrological linkage exists between the development site and the SAC. |

*=Priority

The Stage 1 Screening Assessment concluded that the proposed development would not result in significant effects on 9 no. of these European sites as no source-pathway - receptor linkages have been established between the development site and the European sites. The sites are as follows:

- Ardrahan Grassland SAC
- Castletaylor Complex SAC
- Lough Corrib SAC
- Lough Fingall Complex SAC

- Kiltiernan Turlough SAC
- Monivea Bog SAC
- Rahasane Turlough SAC
- Cregganna Marsh SPA
- Rahasane Turlough SPA.

The AA Screening Report concluded that further examination was required in respect of the 2 no. remaining sites Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site code 000268) and the Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site code 004031) on the basis of a theoretical hydrological link between the development site and the European sites. The site is located within the catchment of the Clarinbridge River which flows into Galway Bay.

The main channel of the river is located c 1.7km to the south of the development site. The river flows for a further distance of 4km before it enters Galway Bay at Clarinbridge village. There are no watercourses or drains on the substation site that would provide hydrological connectivity to the river. The site is also noted to be free draining with no karstic features present that could act as conduits to Galway Bay or any other European site.

Having regard to these matters, the potential does not exist for any hydrological connectivity between the project site and the European sites centred on Galway Bay. I would therefore accept the conclusion reached in the Screening Report that the proposed development does not pose any risk to water quality in Galway Bay and does not have the potential to have adverse effects on any of the qualifying interests or the integrity of the Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site code 000268) or the Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site code 004031).

The report considers potential in-combination effects with other plans and projects, noting that screening for AA for the proposed solar farm assessed the entire project included the proposed substation. It considered local planning applications in the area and other plans and projects (development plan, river basin management plan, flood relief schemes etc) and concluded that potential in combination effects were not likely.

Having regard to the AA Screening for the proposed solar farm and the current AA Screening Report for the proposed substation, I accept that the potential for in-combination effects on European sites can be excluded.

Conclusion on Screening for Appropriate Assessment

The proposed development was considered in light of the requirements of Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Having carried out Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the project, it has been concluded that the project individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on European sites No's 002244, 000242, 000297, 000606, 001285, 002352, 000322, 004142, 004089, 000268 and 004031, or any other European site, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives, and Appropriate Assessment (and submission of a NIS) is not therefore required.

This determination is based on the following;

- the absence of hydrological or other ecological connections between the proposed development and the European sites

No measures designed or intended to avoid or reduce any harmful effects on a European site have been relied upon in this screening exercise.

8.5. Conclusion

- The proposed development is acceptable in principle and will facilitate the transfer of renewable energy generated by the permitted solar farm to the national grid.
- Having regard to the limited nature and scale of the proposed development and the absence of any significant environmental sensitivities in the vicinity, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development.
- Due to the lack of ecological connectivity between the proposed development site and European sites, the proposed development will not give rise to significant effects on European sites or the conservation objectives for which the sites are selected.

- The proposed development is therefore in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1. On the basis of the above assessment, I recommend that the Board approve the proposed development for the reasons and considerations set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations (Draft Order)

In coming to its decision, the Board had regard to the following:

- a) the nature, location, scale and extent of the proposed development,
- b) the characteristics of the site and its general vicinity,
- c) the proximity of the site to the existing 110kV electricity transmission line,
- d) the national targets for renewable energy contribution,
- e) national, regional and local policy support for renewable energy, in particular the :
 - Climate Action Plan 2021
 - Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework
 - Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032
 - Galway County Council Development Plan 2015-2021
- f) the purpose of the proposal as enabling infrastructure for the permitted solar farm
- g) the pattern of development in the area, including the separation distance to dwellings,
- h) the submissions on the file including that from the Planning Authority
- i) the documentation submitted with the application, including the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report,
- j) the report of the Inspector,

Appropriate Assessment

The Board considered the Appropriate Screening Report and all other relevant submissions and carried out an Appropriate Assessment Screening exercise.

The Board agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion carried out in the Inspector's report that the proposed development individually, or, in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on European sites and that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and the submission of a Natura Impact Statement was not required.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development and Likely Significant effects on the environment.

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would accord with national, regional and local planning and related policy, would not have an unacceptable impact on the landscape, biodiversity or cultural heritage, would not seriously injure the visual or residential amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity and would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

11.0 Conditions

1. The proposed development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the proposed development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with agreed particulars. In default of agreement, such matters shall be referred to An Bord Pleanala.

Reason: In the interests of clarity

2. The period during which the proposed development hereby permitted may be constructed shall be 10 years from the date of this order.

Reason: In the interests of clarity.

3. No works permitted by this grant of permission shall commence until such time as the temporary construction access from the R446 regional route, permitted under planning register reference number 17/1544 has been constructed.

Reason: In the interests of traffic safety.

4. Water supply and drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works in respect of both the construction and operation phases of the development

Reason: In the interests of environmental protection and public health.

5. Site development and building works shall be carried out only between the hours of 0700 to 1900 Mondays to Fridays inclusive, between 0800 to 1400 hours on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays or public holidays. Deviation from these times will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority

Reason: In order to safeguard the amenities of property in the vicinity.

6. The perimeter of the site shall be planted with native trees and shrubs in accordance with a landscaping plan which shall be submitted and agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development on the site. The plan shall indicate the species, variety, number, size and locations of all proposed trees and shrubs and a timescale for implementation.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

7. (a) During the operational phase of the proposed development, the noise level arising from the development, as measured at the nearest noise sensitive location shall not exceed:

(i) An LAeqT value of 55 dB(A) during the period 0800 to 2200 hours from Monday to Saturday inclusive [The T value shall be one hour]

(ii) An LAeqT value of 45 dB(A) at any other time. [The T value shall be 15 minutes]. The noise at such time shall not contain a tonal component.

At no time shall the noise generated on site result in an increase in noise level of more than 10 dB(A) above background levels at the boundary of the site.

(b) All sound measurement shall be carried out in accordance with ISO Recommendation R 199 "Assessment of Noise with respect to Community Response" as amended by ISO Recommendations R 1996 1,2 or 3 "Description and Measurement of Environmental Noise", as applicable.

Reason: To protect the amenities of property in the vicinity.

8. The undertaker shall comply with the following requirements:

(a) All lighting within the site shall be cowled to prevent overspill outside the site. No additional artificial lighting shall be installed or operated on site unless authorised by a prior grant of permission.

(b) CCTV cameras shall be fixed and angled to face into the site. The location of CCTV cameras within the compound shall be agreed with the planning authority prior to commencement of work on the site.

(c) Cables within the site shall be placed underground.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and of visual and residential amenity.

9. The developer shall facilitate the preservation, recording and protection of archaeological materials or features that may exist on the site. In this regard, the developer shall-

(a) notify the planning authority in writing at least four weeks prior to the commencement of any site operation (including hydrological and geotechnical investigations) in relation to the development,

(b) employ a suitably qualified archaeologist who shall monitor all site investigations and other excavation works.

(c) provide arrangements, acceptable to the planning authority, for the recording and for the removal of any archaeological material which the authority considers appropriate to remove.

In default of agreement on any of these requirements, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

Reason: In order to conserve the archaeological heritage of the site and to secure the preservation and protection of any remain that may exist on the site.

10. Prior to commencement of development, a detailed Construction Management Plan for the construction stage shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority. The Construction Management Plan shall incorporate the following:
- (a) a detailed plan for the construction phase incorporating inter alia, construction programme, supervisory measures, noise management measures, traffic management and road restoration measures, construction hours and the management of construction waste
 - (b) a comprehensive programme for the implementation of all monitoring commitments made in the application and supporting documentation during the construction period,
 - (c) invasive species management plan.
 - (d) an emergency response plan, and
 - (e) proposals in relation to public information and communication.

A record of daily checks that the works are undertaken in accordance with the Construction Management Plan shall be available for public inspection by the planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of environmental protection and orderly development.

11. Prior to commencement of development, the undertaker shall lodge with the planning authority a bond of an insurance company, a cash deposit or

other security to secure the provision and satisfactory completion of the development, coupled with an agreement empowering the planning authority to apply such security or part thereof to the satisfactory completion of any part of the development.

Reason: To ensure the satisfactory completion of the development.

.Breda Gannon
Senior Planning Inspector

17th, November 2021