



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 310740-21

Development

Request to make alterations to previously permitted windfarm (application reference number 19.PA0047)

Location

Cloncreen, Co. Offaly

Planning Authority

Offaly County Council

Applicant

Bord na Mona Powergen Ltd.

Type of Application

Section 146B - Request to alter previously approved Strategic Infrastructure Project

Inspector

Pauline Fitzpatrick

1.0 Introduction

The requester was granted permission under ref. PA0047 for a 21 no. turbine windfarm and ancillary development including a 110kV substation on Cloncreen Bog in Co. Offaly. Previous requests were made under Section 146B for amendments to the approved development which are outlined in the next section of this report. The requester is now submitting this request to An Bord Pleanála, pursuant to section 146B of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended), for further alterations to the terms of that permission as it relates to the approved windfarm.

2.0 Planning History

PL19.PA0047 - The Board granted permission for a windfarm subject to 17 conditions under the Strategic Infrastructure Development provisions on 3rd May 2017. The development comprises -

- 21 no. wind turbines with an overall blade tip height of up to 170 metres.
- 1 no. borrow pit located in the northern section of the site.
- 1 no. 120 metre high permanent anemometry mast.
- 21.5 km of new site access tracks and associated drainage.
- 1 no. 110kV substation at one of two possible locations
- Associated underground electrical and communications cabling connecting the turbines to the proposed substation at either Ballykilleen or Cloncreen.
- 2 no. temporary construction compounds.
- Demolition of canteen building and removal of 40 metre high telecommunications mast and 100 metre high meteorological mast.
- New access junctions, improvements and temporary modifications of existing road infrastructure.

303313-18 – Section 146B request. It was determined that the lengthening of the blades of the proposed turbines, while remaining within the previously permitted tip height of 170 metres, would not result in a material alteration to the terms of the

development, the subject of the permission. The decision was made on 4th April 2019.

ABP 307401-20 – Section 146B request. It was determined that the amendment to the design of the wind farm 110kV substation and minor alterations to the wind farm site layout, including the relocation of a temporary construction compound, alteration to site access track and site services, including the internal cable collector network to facilitate the substation alterations would not result in a material alteration to the terms of development, the subject of the permission. The decision was made on 14th August, 2020.

ABP 308171-20 – Section 146B request. It was determined that the further alterations to the 110kV substation as previously amended under ref. ABP 307401-20 reverting to a design and layout similar to that originally permitted under the initial SID consent (ref. PL19.PA0047) would not result in a material alteration to the terms of development, the subject of the permission. The decision was made on the 2nd November, 2020.

3.0 Proposed Changes

The changes proposed as part of the subject 146B request are as follows:-

- Provision of a 36 metre high telecommunications tower of lattice design. The foundations will measure 7m x 7m. within a compound 13 metres x 13 metres to be delineated by palisade fencing. There will be a number of satellite/communication antennas located at various levels along the tower.

It is to be located approx. 8 metres to the south of the substation as permitted and is to replace the 20 metre high telecom pole which forms part of the substation as permitted.

- 75 metres of cabling to connect the tower to the substation.
- New section of service road measuring 13 metres in length and 9 metres wide to facilitate access to the compound.

The requirement comes about following ongoing discussions with Eirgrid in terms of its operational requirements. The purpose of the tower is to facilitate the

satisfactory communication and transfer of data between the Cloncreen windfarm and Eirgrid to ensure optimal monitoring and control of the substation.

4.0 Requester's Submission

The requester considers that the alteration sought does not constitute the making of a material alteration of the permitted development and would not give rise to significant environmental effects beyond those already considered in the original EIS, the Board's previously completed EIA, their assessment of subsequent Section 146B submissions, and what has been addressed and mitigated by conditions attached to the existing consent for Cloncreen Wind Farm.

The request is accompanied by a Planning Report containing a screening analysis of likely significant direct and indirect effects in section 5 and an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report in Appendix 3.

Planning Policy Context

- The alteration is seeking to deliver the development as consented but with a more effective management of the electrical connection to the national grid.
- The proposed amendments are required to ensure sufficient capacity to transmit signals from the windfarm to the system operator control centres (both national and distribution control centres), the purpose of which is to allow for more efficient and accurate monitoring and control of the permitted wind farm. At present there is no additional capacity within the control mechanisms of the Cushaling power station to relay signal to the respective control centres. The optimal approach is to utilise a dedicated telecoms tower at Cloncreen to relay signals back to the control centres.

Environmental Considerations

- The details set out throughout the report, the accompanying details and AA Screening Report provide the Board with full details and description of the nature of the proposed works, relevant environmental sensitivities and potential effects arising in the context of the proposed amendment
- It is considered that EIA is not required.

Population and Human Health

- The proposed telecommunications tower will be contained within its own compound accessible only by appropriate staff. It is 8 metres from the permitted substation.
- It will be in excess of 650 metres from the nearest residential dwelling. It will not affect residential amenity.
- The suite of operational and construction mitigation measures as set out in the permission will continue to apply.
- The proposed works do not require modifications to the turbines thus there will be no change in the assessed impacts arising from shadow flicker.

Flora and Fauna

- The works will result in a minor increase in habitat loss (eg. cutover raised bog) from that arising from that originally permitted development assessed under ref. PA0047 due to increased development footprint. The habitat loss is restricted to habitats of local importance.
- The control measures for sediment run-off and hydrocarbons remain the same.
- The habitat loss will not result in any additional impacts on terrestrial fauna.

Soils and Geology

- The amendments will require increased excavation of peat and subsoil but the increase is minor in nature. Established best practice and associated mitigation measures as per the EIS, CEMP and Peat Management Plan as well as conditions 6 and 7 will apply.

Water

- The siting of site services eg. drainage will be amended in accordance with the proposed alterations. The design principles and maintenance requirements set out in the EIS will not change.

Air and Climate

- The construction measures shall be in accordance with those detailed in the EIS and assessed in EIA.
- The consented wind farm will be a significant renewable energy asset. This will not be altered and the amendment will aid in the optimum operation of the wind farm.

Noise

- The proposed alteration will not introduce any new infrastructure which will impact on the noise assessment previously carried out.
- Operating noise levels from the windfarm and substation will comply with the provisions of condition 8 and will be subject to a noise compliance monitoring programme.

Landscape and Visual

- The alterations will be localised to the internal footprint of the windfarm.
- It is replacing a 20 metre telecom pole previously permitted.
- The introduction of a 36 metre high structure in the context of the overall development is considered minor with the tip height of the turbine blades permitted 170 metres.
- It will not adversely affect the local or regional amenities within the wider setting eg. High Amenity Areas, Protected Views or Scenic Routes.

Cultural Heritage and Archaeology

- The construction of the windfarm and amended substation will comply with condition 13 of the permission and will be subject to an archaeological appraisal and on-site monitoring programme.

Material Assets

- The amendments will not materially alter construction phase traffic volumes. The implementation of the Transport Management Plan required by condition 12 will consider the proposed alterations in full.

- No impacts on telecommunications are anticipated. The provisions of condition 10 of the permission will be complied with.

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (Appendix 3)

- No pathway for the proposal to result in any significant effect on any European site was identified when considered on its own during the assessment proposed and, therefore, there is no potential for it to contribute to any such effect when considered with other developments.
- It can be concluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt, in view of best scientific knowledge, on the basis of objective information and in light of the conservation objectives of the relevant European sites, that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans and projects will not have a significant effect on any European Site.

5.0 Legislative Basis

Section 146B. — (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (8) and section 146C, the Board may, on the request of any person who is carrying out or intending to carry out a strategic infrastructure development, alter the terms of the development the subject of a planning permission, approval or other consent granted under this Act.

(2)(a) As soon as practicable after the making of such a request, the Board shall make a decision as to whether the making of the alteration to which the request relates would constitute the making of a material alteration of the terms of the development concerned.

(b) Before making a decision under this subsection, the Board may invite submissions in relation to the matter to be made to it by such person or class of person as the Board considers appropriate (which class may comprise the public if, in the particular case, the Board determines that it shall do so); the Board shall have regard to any submissions made to it on foot of that invitation.

(3)(a) If the Board decides that the making of the alteration would not constitute the making of a material alteration of the terms of the development concerned, it shall alter the planning permission, approval or other consent accordingly and notify the

person who made the request under this section, and the planning authority or each planning authority for the area or areas concerned, of the alteration.

(b) If the Board decides that the making of the alteration would constitute the making of such a material alteration, it shall —

(i) by notice in writing served on the requester, require the requester to submit to the Board the information specified in Schedule 7A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 in respect of that alteration, or in respect of the alternative alteration being considered by it under subparagraph (ii)(II) , unless the requester has already provided such information, or an environmental impact assessment report on such alteration or alternative alteration, as the case may be, to the Board, and

(ii) following the receipt of such information or report, as the case may be, determine whether to —

(I) make the alteration,

(II) make an alteration of the terms of the development concerned, being an alteration that would be different from that to which the request relates (but which would not, in the opinion of the Board, represent, overall, a more significant change to the terms of the development than that which would be represented by the latter alteration), or

(III) refuse to make the alteration.

(3A) Where the requester is submitting to the Board the information referred to in subsection (3)(b)(i) , that information shall be accompanied by any further relevant information on the characteristics of the alteration under consideration and its likely significant effects on the environment including, where relevant, information on how the available results of other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment carried out pursuant to European Union legislation other than the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive have been taken into account.

(3B) Where the requester is submitting to the Board the information referred to in subsection (3)(b)(i) , that information may be accompanied by a description of the features, if any, of the alteration under consideration and the measures, if any,

envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment of the alteration.

(4) Before making a determination under subsection (3)(b)(iii), the Board shall determine whether the extent and character of —

(a) the alteration requested under subsection (1), and

(b) any alternative alteration it is considering under subsection (3)(b)(ii)(II)

are such that the alteration, were it to be made, would be likely to have significant effects on the environment (and, for this purpose, the Board shall have reached a final decision as to what is the extent and character of any alternative alteration the making of which it is so considering).

6.0 Board Correspondence

The Board informed Offaly County Council on 5th July 2021 of the request received and enclosed a copy of same.

The planning authority was not invited to make any submission at this stage.

7.0 Assessment

The first consideration in relation to this request to alter the terms of PA0047 is to determine if the making of the alteration would constitute the making of a material alteration of the terms of the permitted windfarm development.

The development as granted under ref. PA0047 comprises 21 no. turbines and ancillary infrastructure including 1 no. 110kV substation and 2 no. construction compounds. Condition 1 attached to the decision required the development to be carried out in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application subject to any requirements necessary to comply with the other 16 conditions.

The EIS that accompanied the original application under ref. PA0047 gave due consideration and assessed two options in terms of the 110kV substation location to be provided to serve the windfarm. Option A located in the eastern section of the site emerged as the preferred location and has been the subject of two section 146B requests to the Board under refs. ABP 304701-20 and subsequently ABP 307171-

20. The Board decided that the alterations were not material. As amended, the substation has a stated area of 6,260 sq.m. with control buildings and associated infrastructure including transformers, disconnectors, lighting mast and a 20 metre high telecom pole. The substation is to be located approx. 72 metres from the southern site boundary and 625 metres from the nearest sensitive receptor located on the R501.

Following further engagement with Eirgrid the need for a 36 metre high telecommunications tower has been identified so as to facilitate the satisfactory communication and transfer of data between the windfarm and Eirgrid as Transmission System Operator (TSO) and thus allow for the optimal monitoring and control of the substation. This would replace the above referenced telecom pole.

The mast required is a lattice structure, 36 metres in height. It is to be positioned 8 metres to the south of the substation within a compound of 13 metres x 13 metres, enclosed by fencing. It will require a cable connection to the substation totalling 75 metres in length with small addition to a service road to allow for access.

Section 5 of the Planning Report accompanying the request effectively assesses the impact of the proposed alterations relative to the impacts as identified in the EIS.

Human Beings

In my opinion no new considerations arise in terms of human beings. The height of the mast within a small compound of 169 sq.m. immediately adjacent to the permitted substation will have a separation distance of over 650 metres from the nearest sensitive receptor located on the R401. The works will have no impact on noise. I therefore accept the conclusion that the proposed alterations will not alter the findings of the EIA.

Biodiversity

The proposed increase in the spatial footprint of the hard surfaced area over that permitted under PA0047 will result in a marginal increase in habitat loss. The habitat is comprised of cutover raised bog and scrub which are considered to be of local importance. Drainage management will be within the design parameters set out in the EIS and the mitigation measures specified. The alterations are unlikely to result in any additional impact on flora, fauna and avifauna over that as originally assessed in the EIS.

I therefore accept the conclusions that the proposed alterations do not alter the assessment in the EIS and that there would be no significant ecological impacts other than those already considered by the Board and addressed by mitigation and condition.

Soils and Geology

The amendments, including the additional small section of service road to allow for access, will result in a marginal increase in peat removal from that assessed under ref. PA0047. The general location of the substation compound was selected on the findings of detailed geotechnical investigations and peat stability risk assessments. I accept the requester's assertion that based on these findings and the general margin of safety of the site that the proposed footprint of the telecommunications mast and compound will not result in the intensification of risk associated with peat instability.

Established best practice and associated mitigation measures for managing peat excavation, soil contamination by leakages and spillages, soil erosion and peat instability as set out in the EIS, Construction and Environmental Management Plan and Peat Management Plan will continue to apply. Conditions 6 and 7 of the permission will pertain.

Water

The drainage design principles and maintenance requirements set out within the EIS will not change. There will be a marginal increase in impermeable surfaces from that permitted under PA0047. The permitted drainage measures will create significant attenuation to what is already present on the site. I therefore accept the conclusion that the proposed alterations would not give rise to significant effects over that assessed in the EIS and the EIA undertaken by the Board.

Air and Climate

The dust suppression measures during the construction phase as detailed in the EIS will apply with no impacts anticipated during the operational phase over those as assessed for the permitted development.

Landscape

In the context of the overall permitted project comprising of 21 no. wind turbines of up to 170 metres in height, the alterations of views of the site arising from the 36 metre high telecommunications mast of lattice construction would be minor from both distance and proximate views including views from sensitive receptors and along public roads. I do not consider that the change to be substantial to conclude that it is of a different nature or has significantly increased visual impact. I do not consider that the visual impact would warrant revised conditions if the development incorporating the mast came before the Board. I agree with the requester's submission that the introduction of the mast does not alter the conclusions set out in the EIS.

Cultural Heritage

Condition 13 attached to the parent permission requires an archaeological appraisal and assessment of the site prior to commencement of construction works. The proposed amendments will not alter these requirements.

Material Assets

The proposed alterations will not materially alter the vehicle movements both for construction and operational phases modelled in the EIS. Condition 12 attached to the decision refers to the traffic and transport arrangements for the construction phase.

Conditions 10 and 11 address telecommunications and aviation requirements and the proposed alterations would be bound by same.

Interaction of Impacts

I accept the conclusion that the interaction of impacts does not materially alter those identified in the EIS and assessed in the EIA.

Conclusion

The proposed works can be implemented while still ensuring that the overall terms and conditions of the permitted wind farm development can continue to be met without impediment. The mast will not alter the operational profile or character of the permitted substation or windfarm. The works are confined to a localised area within the eastern extent of the approved wind farm.

I submit that no new considerations arise in relation to impacts on the environment which were not considered in the assessment of impacts for PA0047. Any impact on landscape, soil and water as referred to above, would be marginal.

I am of the opinion, having fully considered the proposed alterations and the development as granted under PA0047, that the Board would not have determined the proposal differently had the telecommunications mast and additional service road now proposed in the alteration formed part of the said application. In that regard, I consider it reasonable to conclude that the proposal subject of this request does not constitute the making of a material alteration of the development as granted under PA0047 and altered under 304701-20 and 308171-20.

I have considered the provisions of s.146B(2)(b) which provides for, at the Board's discretion, the invitation of submissions from persons, including the public. Having considered the nature, scale and extent of the alteration, the information on file and the nature, scale and extent of the development granted under PA0047 I am of the opinion that the inviting of submissions from the public in this instance is not necessary and is not required for the purposes of the Board in determining the matter.

Appropriate Assessment

Stage 1 - Screening

Under PA0047 the Board completed an Appropriate Assessment Screening exercise in relation to Natura 2000 sites within a 15 km radius of the application site. In addition, using the precautionary principle, European Sites located outside the 15km buffer zone were also taken into account. 4 no. of the sites were screened out. The Board then undertook an Appropriate Assessment in relation to the effects of the development proposed under PA0047 on the 1 site that was not screened out, namely River Barrow and River Nore SAC (site code 002162). The Board concluded that the proposed development, by itself, or in combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to adversely affect the integrity of this European Sites in view of the site's conservation objectives.

A NIS was prepared and submitted as part of the application in relation to PA0047. The requester has submitted an AA Screening Report in relation to the alterations that are the subject of this section 146B request. The 5 sites that were subject of the

AA Screening in PA0047 are again considered in the context of the alterations subject of this section 146B request. The AA Screening report on file concludes that, in relation to the 1 Natura 2000 site that was subject of the Appropriate Assessment in PA0047, given the nature of the proposed works, the distance of the proposed works from the European Site and the nature of the conservation objectives for this site, there is no potential pathway for the alterations to result in direct or indirect impacts on the European Site.

Having considered the Board's determination on Appropriate Assessment on PA0047, section 11.3 of the Inspector's Report on PA0047, the nature, scale and extent of the proposed alterations relative to the development subject of and approved under PA0047, and the information on file which I consider adequate to carry out AA Screening, I consider it reasonable to conclude that the alterations proposed, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on the European sites in view of the sites' conservation objectives.

8.0 Recommendation

I recommend that the Board decides that the making of the alterations subject of this request do not constitute the making of a material alteration of the terms of the development as granted permission under 19.PA0047 and alteration reference numbers ABP 303313-18, ABP 307401-20 and ABP 308171-20.

DRAFT ORDER

REQUEST received by An Bord Pleanála on the 30th day of June, 2021 from Bord na Mona Powergen Ltd. c/o MKO Planning and Environmental Consultants, Tuam Road, Galway under section 146B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, to alter the terms of a strategic infrastructure development described as the proposed Cloncreen Wind Farm comprising of up to 21 wind turbines and all associated works subject of a permission under An Bord Pleanála reference number 19.PA0047 and alteration reference numbers ABP 303313-18, ABP 307401-20 and ABP 308171-20.

WHEREAS the Board made a decision to grant permission, subject to conditions, for the above-mentioned development by order dated the 3rd day of May 2017,

AND WHEREAS the Board decided that alterations to the above-mentioned decision, that were requested on 21st day of December 2018, 16th day of June 2020 and 2nd November 2020 would not result in material alterations to the terms of the development and so altered the decision under 19.PA0047,

AND WHEREAS the Board has received another request to alter the terms of the development, the subject of the permission,

AND WHEREAS the proposed alteration is described as follows:

Development of a telecommunications tower measuring 36 metres in height along with a telecommunications compound (13m by 13m) and fencing, cabling and infrastructure to facilitate connections to the permitted 110kV substation, associated service road (178m²) and all associated works. The telecommunications tower will replace a 20 metre telecommunications mast which was previously permitted.

AND WHEREAS the Board decided, in accordance with section 146B(2)(b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, not to invite submissions or observations from the public in relation to whether the proposed alteration would constitute the making of a material alteration to the terms of the development concerned,

AND WHEREAS the Board decided, in accordance with section 146B(2)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that the proposed alterations would not result in a material alteration to the terms of the development, the subject of the permission,

AND WHEREAS having considered all of the documents on file and the Inspector's report, the Board considered that the making of the proposed alteration would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment or on any European Site,

NOW THEREFORE in accordance with section 146B(3)(a) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, the Board hereby alters the abovementioned decision so that the permitted development shall be altered in accordance with the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála on the 30th June, 2021 for the reasons and considerations set out below.

MATTERS CONSIDERED

In making its decision, the Board had regard to those matters to which, by virtue of the Planning and Development Acts and Regulations made thereunder, it was required to have regard.

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Having regard to:

- (i) the nature and scale of the wind farm development permitted under An Bord Pleanála reference number 19.PA0047 for this site, which includes 21 turbines, a 110kV substation and 2 no. temporary construction compounds,
- (ii) the alteration made to the above permitted development under An Bord Pleanála reference numbers ABP 307401-20 and ABP 308171-20 for amendments to the design of the 110kV substation, relocation of temporary construction compound, amendments to internal wind farm road

layout and ancillary works to permitted site services including drainage and internal cable network.

- (iii) the examination of the environmental impact, including in relation to Natura 2000 sites, carried out in the course of that application,
- (iv) the limited nature and scale of the alterations when considered in relation to the overall permitted development
- (v) the absence of any significant new or additional environmental concerns (including in relation to Natura 2000 sites) arising as a result of the proposed alterations, and
- (vi) the report of the Board's inspector, which is adopted,

It is considered that the proposed alterations would not be material. In accordance with section 146B(3)(a) of the Planning & Development Act, as amended, the Board hereby makes the said alterations.

Pauline Fitzpatrick
Senior Planning Inspector

July, 2021