



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-313001-22

Development	Development of 110kV substation and underground grid connection to existing 110kV Charleville substation.
Location	Ballyroe Townland, Charleville, Co. Cork
Planning Authority	Cork County Council
Prospective Applicant	Soleire Renewables Ltd.
Inspector	Karla Mc Bride
Date of site inspection:	31 st March 2022

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Soleire Renewables Ltd. requested Pre-Application Consultations under Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, for the proposed development of a 110kV substation. Pre-Application Consultations took place between An Bord Pleanála (the Board) and the prospective applicant on 3rd May 2022 (see appended signed Record).
- 1.2. The primary purpose of the meeting was to address the issue of whether or not the proposed development constitutes strategic infrastructure for the purposes of the 2000 Act, as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, 2006, and to consider matters relating to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area or the environment which may have a bearing on the Board's decision, and procedures involved in making the application.
- 1.3. This Report provides an overview of the project, a summary of the meeting and the advice provided by the Board, the legislative provisions, and it recommends a list of Prescribed Bodies that should be forwarded copies of the application.

2.0 Site Location

- 2.1. The site is located within a rural area at Ballyroe Townland c.6km to the S of Charleville town centre in County Cork. It is located c.1.5km to the W of the N20 road to Cork and on the W side of the L5529 local road. There are several dwelling houses and agricultural buildings in the surrounding area and an active quarry to the S, and the existing 110kV Charleville substation is located c.4.5km to the N of the site. The lands are in agricultural use and the site is partially occupied by a hardstanding and agricultural buildings, the site boundaries are defined by trees and hedges and the lands are relatively flat. The site is located to the N of the Awbeg River which is a tributary of the River Blackwater, and the adjacent lands are covered by the River Blackwater SAC designation. The lands are not covered by any sensitive landscape designations although there several features of archaeological importance and cultural heritage interest in the vicinity, and in particular to the N of the site.

3.0 Proposed development

The proposed development would comprise a new 110kV substation on a c. 1.25ha site with an underground cable connection to the existing Charleville 110kV substation to the N by means of a “tail fed” arrangement.

The 110kV Single Bay Tail Fed substation would include:

- Grid transformer and busbar compound.
- 2 x single storey control & switchgear buildings.
- Underground cable connection to the 110kV Charleville kV substation (4.4km) along the same route as the permitted 38kV solar farm grid connection.
- Security & safety fencing.

The prospective applicant indicated that the proposed substation would facilitate the permitted solar farm on the adjacent lands (Reg. Ref. 20/0441), and other renewable energy projects in the vicinity to connect to the national grid.

4.0 Prospective applicants’ case

4.1. Soleire Renewables Ltd. is proposing to construct a 110kV substation which would be connected to the existing Charleville 110kV substation to the N of the site via a “tail fed” arrangement and an underground cable. It is envisaged that the proposed substation would be a transmission node on the national grid.

4.2. Soleire Renewables Ltd. proposes to develop a solar farm on the adjacent lands (c. 102ha) which would be connected to the proposed 110kV substation via underground cables, and hence the existing Charleville 110kV substation to the N. The solar farm was recently granted planning permission by Cork County Council under Reg. Ref. 20/04041.

4.3. The key elements of the Applicant’s submission in support of the case being designated as strategic infrastructure are summarised as follows:

- Given the size and electricity generation potential of the proposed 110kV substation and its characteristics, the proposed development meets the

relevant criteria of the P&D Act 2000, as amended and constitutes strategic infrastructure.

- The substation will become a transmission node on the national grid and interact between the existing Charleville 110kV substation and permitted Ballyroe solar farm.

4.4. It was concluded that the proposed development should be deemed a SID.

5.0 Pre-Application Consultations

5.1. One Consultation meeting was held in the Board offices on 3rd May 2022.

5.2. During this meeting the prospective applicant described the site and surroundings, outlined the main elements of the proposed development and provided an update on the status of the project and related solar farm projects. The policy context for the project was explained, the major constraints and options considered were identified, and the consultations undertaken to date were outlined. The Board representatives identified several areas of concern (incl. potential impacts on: - hydrological connections to the Awbeg River; flood risk & drainage; residential amenity including disturbance during construction works along the local road network; ecology, including the relationship with the Blackwater River SAC. Freshwater pearl mussel catchment, and bird flight paths; haul routes & the possible widening of roads or junctions; the need for EIA Screening, AA Screening/NIS, and community engagement). The Board representatives queried the current planning status of the adjacent solar farm.

5.3. The prospective applicant, in a letter received by the Board on 03rd June 2022, wishes to formally request the closure of the pre-application process, and a determination that the proposal constitutes strategic infrastructure under S.182A (9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), as meaning the transport of electricity by means of (a) high voltage line where the voltage would be 110kV or more.

5.4. The Board's advice to the prospective applicant during the pre-application consultation meetings is summarised below:

- (a) Consult with the NPWS in relation to potential impacts on the River Blackwater SAC and Freshwater pearl mussel Catchment, and any further afield European sites that may have a mobile connection to the site; consult with the IFI in relation to potential impacts on the River Blackwater and nearby watercourses; and assess potential impacts on residential amenity, cultural heritage, the landscape, drainage patterns and flood risk, and the local road network (incl. junctions).
- (b) A comprehensive and detailed Environmental Report should be prepared which has particular regard to the impact of the proposed development on ecology and biodiversity, residential amenity, cultural and built heritage, drainage, water quality, flood risk and traffic management.
- (c) A comprehensive and detailed AA Screening/NIS should be prepared having regard to the presence of European sites in the surrounding area.
- (d) Due consideration should be given to in-combination effects on the environment with other existing and proposed developments in the wider area, including the permitted solar farm.
- (e) Public consultation should be as extensive as possible and consultations should take place with Cork County Council, Prescribed Bodies and the local community.

6.0 Legislative provisions

- 6.1. Under **section 182A (1)** of the 2000 Act (inserted by section 4 of the 2006 Act) where a person, (thereafter referred to as 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.
- 6.2. **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.

6.3. In **section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999**, “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, from one substation 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

7.0 Assessment

- 7.1. The proposed development comprises a new 110kV substation and underground connection to the existing 110kV Charleville Substation to the N. It is envisaged that electricity generated by the renewable energy projects (incl. the Ballyroe solar farm) would be fed into the national grid via the proposed substation.
- 7.2. I am satisfied that the proposed 110kV substation constitutes electric plant as defined in section 6.0 above in that it is plant for the purposes connected with the generation of electricity.
- 7.3. Section 182A (9) of the Act sets a threshold of 110kV in order for a high voltage electricity transmission line to be considered strategic infrastructure. No threshold is set in respect of a substation.
- 7.4. The proposed Single Bay substation involves a “Tail-fed” connection to an existing 110kV Charleville substation and it would comprise a new transmission node along the existing circuit. The new substation and associated underground cable will form part of the existing transmission grid when in operation. I am satisfied that the proposed substation, in forming a node on the transmission network, constitutes Strategic Infrastructure.
- 7.5. In terms of matters which might influence the decision of the Board I note that there is potential for indirect effects, interactions and cumulative impacts which would be relevant to consideration in an Environmental Report and under AA Screening and/or NIS reports. A Screening report for sub-threshold EIA should also be considered.
- 7.6. In conclusion, I consider that the proposed substation development and grid connection as described in the submissions and drawings constitutes strategic infrastructure coming within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, necessitating an application direct to the Board.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1. I recommend that Soleire Renewables Ltd. be informed that the proposed development consisting of a 110kV substation, cables and related ancillary infrastructure at Ballyroe Townland, Charleville, County Cork as set out in the plans,

particulars and correspondence received by An Bord Pleanála on the 7th March 2022 03rd May 2022, 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.

9.0 Prescribed Bodies

The following is a schedule of prescribed bodies considered relevant for the purposes of Section 37E (3) (c) of the Principal Act.

- i. Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- ii. Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications
- iii. Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy
- iv. Inland Fisheries Ireland
- v. Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- vi. The Heritage Council
- vii. An Taisce
- viii. An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- ix. Fáilte Ireland
- x. Health & Safety Authority

Further notifications should also be made where deemed appropriate.

Karla Mc Bride
Senior Planning Inspector
04th July 2022