



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-315645-23.

Development

Proposed 110kV electrical infrastructure and connection to the National Grid at the existing 400kV Moneypoint substation.

Location

Cahermurphy and Moneypoint, Co. Clare.

Planning Authority

Clare County Council.

Prospective Applicant

Mid Clare Renewable Energy Windfarm Ltd.

Type of Application

Pre-application consultation.

Date of Site Inspection

28th June 2023 & 11th September 2024.

Inspector

A. Considine.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Board received a request on 27th of January 2023 from prospective applicant, Mid Clare Renewable Energy Windfarm Ltd, through their agent MKO, with an address at Tuam Road, Galway, to enter into pre-application consultations under Section 182E of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) in relation to the proposed 110kV electrical infrastructure and connection to the National Grid at the existing 400kV Moneypoint substation in the townlands of Cahermurphy and Moneypoint, Co. Clare. The proposed development comprises the development of electrical infrastructure which will facilitate the connection of the proposed Cahermurphy Two Wind Farm (Pl. ref: 20/658, ABP ref: ABP-311044-21) to the existing 400kV Moneypoint Substation, Co. Clare. The Board will note that an initial request was made on the 25th of January 2023, but an error was noted in the letter submitted so a fresh letter was prepared.
- 1.2. A pre-application consultation meeting was subsequently held between An Bord Pleanála and the prospective applicant on 29th August 2023. A second meeting was requested by the prospective applicant on the 26th of July 2024, and this meeting was held on the 19th of September 2024. The prospective applicant formally requested closure of the pre-application consultation process by written correspondence received by the Commission on 15th October 2025.
- 1.3. The primary purpose of pre-application consultation is 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. This Report provides an overview of the proposed project, the relevant legislative provisions and an opinion as to whether or not the proposal is strategic infrastructure development.
- 1.4. The Board will note that the prospective applicant has considered that the proposed development falls within Section 182A of the Act and comprises Strategic Infrastructure.
- 1.5. The Board will also note that the proposed Cahermurphy Two Wind Farm (Pl. ref: 20/658, ABP ref: ABP-311044-21) was refused by the Board on the 13th of March

2023. The application sought permission for 10 turbines including 1 no. 38kV permanent electrical substation to be constructed at one of two possible locations within the site, and the connection of the proposed windfarm to the national electricity grid via an underground cable to the existing Booltiagh 110kV substation, located approximately 7km to the east of the site.

- 1.6. The current proposed development seeks to change this approach in terms of connection to the national grid due to capacity issues at Booltiagh. As connection to the existing Slievecallan 110kV substation cannot be secured, the nearest next available option is the 110kV Substation at Moneypoint. It is proposed that grid connection will connect the on-site substation and the existing 110kV GIS substation building located within the 400kV ESB Moneypoint Substation Complex in County Clare.
- 1.7. This decision, ABP-311044-21, was judicially reviewed by the applicant and was quashed by Order of the High Court and the matter was remitted back to the Board for decision (ABP-318525-23 refers). At the time of writing, no decision has been made on this case. The applicant indicates that they are progressing with the proposed 110kV Electrical Infrastructure and are progressing with a revised wind farm layout (referred to as 'Cahermurphy West Wind Farm'). A pre-app meeting on this revised wind farm layout proposal was held on the 9th of August 2024, ABP-319676-24 refers. The letter requesting the closing of the subject pre-application request notes that the application associated with the ABP-319676-24 request will include the proposed 110kV substation.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. Given the nature of the proposed development, which comprises electrical connections to a proposed new 110kV substation at Cahermurphy to the existing 400kV substation at Moneypoint, the development, the subject of this pre-app, consists of a linear site that is primarily located within or adjacent to the public road network in west County Clare.

- 2.2. The proposed substation is to be located within the boundary of the proposed Cahermurphy Two Wind Farm development (previously refused planning permission by the Board and was the subject of JR Proceedings and remitted back to the Board) with two possible locations initially identified. The applicant has advised that the southern location is deemed to be the most favourable location as it is closer to Moneypoint and satisfies the separation distance required by EirGrid between turbines and substation equipment. Studies and assessments to inform the final design and positioning of the substation are ongoing and will inform the EIAR which will accompany the planning application.
- 2.3. The identified site comprises an elevated area in the landscape, and within the development boundaries of the proposed windfarm site. The location is very rural with only a small number of residential properties noted. The site lies approximately 2.9km to the southwest of Doo Lough and is set back from the public road by approximately 500m.

3.0 Proposed Development

- 3.1. The proposed development comprises the provision of a new 110kV electrical substation at the proposed windfarm site and the laying of a 110kV underground cable between the proposed on-site substation and the existing 110kV GIS substation building located within the 400kV ESB Moneypoint Substation Complex in Co. Clare. The configuration of the substation layout is designed to cater for Eirgrid's future expansion requirements, should it be required to make provision for future grid connections.
- 3.2. The substation will be designed and installed as a permanent structure and will not be decommissioned as part of the windfarm, subject to a grant of permission. The exact location of the new 110kV substation is still under review but will be located at or in the vicinity of the southernmost substation identified in the windfarm application.
- 3.3. The prospective applicant initially identified two grid route options, with a further minor option for route 1, which differ slightly in terms of route and length as follows:

- Route Option 1:

- Approximately 25km in length.
- Travelling south on leaving the site before turning west along the local road crossing the R484 and continuing south via local and minor roads towards Cooraclare.
- The cable will continue south on the L2054 and will cross the N68 at Garraunnatooha and through the village of Knockerra.
- The line crosses the R473 to the south of the village and continues on the L2054 in a south westerly direction to the N67 at Ballymacrinan Bay.
- At Ballymacrinan Bay, the line will turn east into Moneypoint 400kV Complex.
- Route Option 1a:
 - An alternative route is being considered around Cooraclare, bringing the cable west via the R483 before rejoining Route Option 1 route via local and minor roads at Brislá West.
- Route Option 2:
 - Approximately 23km of underground cabling.
 - Travelling south on leaving the site bearing east along the local and minor roads towards Kilmihil.
 - The cable will continue south on Church Street and will cross the R848 and turn west towards Cooraclare turning south before the settlement.
 - The line continues to Gowerhass where it runs into the route option 1 line and follows this line to Moneypoint.

3.4. On the 28th of August, the day prior to the 1st pre-app meeting, the applicant submitted their presentation for the meeting. This presentation identified five options for connection which are being explored, and provided that more than one option may be included in a planning application. The now five options being looked at are described as follows:

- UGC Route Option 1 (Ruby) – corresponds with the originally Proposed Grid Route Option 2 as described above.
- UGC Route Option 2 (Green) - corresponds in part with the originally Proposed Grid Route Option 1a as described above.
- UGC Route Option 3 (Yellow) – comprises a new spur from the originally Proposed Grid Route Option 1a as described above which will turn west at Knockerry towards the R473 (Kilrush to Kildysart Road) and then south towards Kilcarroll and to the N67 at Ballymacrinan Bay.
- UGC Route Option 4 (Orange) – comprises the northern section of the originally Proposed Grid Route Option 1a and includes the originally Proposed Grid Route Option 1 where it will connect to originally Proposed Grid Route Option 2.
- UGC Route Option 5 (Blue) – comprises a new variation of UGC Route Options 1 and 3.

While Route Option 4 is identified as the favoured route option, avoiding catchment areas such as Cooraclare and Kilmihil, Route Option 5 is also identified as an alternative. A more detailed analysis will be carried out in order to determine the viability of each route proposed.

- 3.5. The request for a second pre-application meeting arose to discuss the preferred Grid Connection option that is being considered. The preferred Grid Connection comprises Option 4 as discussed in the 1st meeting. A map of the Grid Connection Route is enclosed with the close-out letter.

4.0 Planning History

The following is the relevant planning history pertaining to the subject site.

ABP- 311044-21 (PA ref: 20/658): Permission refused for the development of a windfarm in the townlands of Cahermurphy, Knocknahila More South, Carrownagry South, Caheraghacullin and Drummin, together with the development of an underground grid connection cable to the National Grid in the townlands of

Cahermurphy, Drummin, Doolough, Glenmore, and Booltiagh. The development will consist of

1. Construction of up to 10 no. wind turbines with a maximum overall blade tip height of up to 170 metres and associated hard strand areas.
2. 1 no. permanent meteorological mast with a maximum height of up to 100 metres.
3. 1 no. 38kV permanent electrical substation which will be constructed at one of two possible locations on site: either Option A in Carrownagry South townland or Option B in Cahermurphy townland. The electrical substation will have 1 no. control building with welfare facilities, all associated electrical plant and equipment, security fencing, all associated underground cabling, wastewater holding tank and all ancillary works.
4. All associated underground electrical and communications cabling connecting the turbines to the proposed on-site substation.
5. All works associated with the connection of the proposed wind farm to the national electricity grid via an underground cable to the existing Booltiagh 110kV substation.
6. Upgrade of existing tracks, roads and provision of new site access roads and hardstand areas.
7. Junction access road works.
8. 2 no. borrow pits.
9. 1 no. temporary construction compound.
10. Site Drainage.
11. Forestry Felling to facilitate construction and operation of the proposed development; and
12. All associated and ancillary site development works.

The application is seeking a ten-year planning permission and 30-year operational life from the date of commissioning of the wind farm. An

Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) have been prepared in respect of the proposed development all at Cahermurphy, Knocknahila More South, Carrownagry South, Caheraghacullin, Drummin, Doolough, Glenmore & Booltiagh, Co Clare.

The Board refused permission for the above development on the 13th of March 2023, for reasons relating to:

1. Site characteristics and insufficient information in relation to ground conditions in terms of blanket bog and proposed repositories.
2. The removal of 63ha of breeding / foraging area suitable as a habitat for the Hen Harrier and notwithstanding mitigation measures proposed, the development would result in unacceptable cumulative adverse ornithological impacts, contrary to objective of the CDP.
3. The Board is not satisfied that it has been demonstrated that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on Natura Sites, and is precluded from granting permission.

Following this refusal of planning permission, the applicant undertook Judicial Review proceedings against the decision. This decision was quashed by Order of the High Court and remitted to the Board for decision **ABP-318525-23 refers**. On the date of writing, no decision has issued on this case.

5.0 Prospective applicant's case

5.1. The prospective applicant's case is that the proposed development should be considered as strategic infrastructure for the following reasons:

- The proposed development includes a high voltage line of 110kV.
- The development consists of high voltage lines and electric plant which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another.

- Comprises 'distribution' in accordance with the legal definition.
- Comprises 'electric plant' in accordance with the legal definition.

5.2. The proposed infrastructure will directly facilitate the connection of the Cahermurphy Two Wind Farm (if granted) to the national grid. The infrastructure when constructed will be owned and managed by Eirgrid and will have capacity to accommodate additional and future renewable energy projects. It is concluded that the proposed development falls within the scope of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act and a formal meeting with the Board was requested.

6.0 Legislative Provisions

- 6.1. Section 182A(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) requires that where a person (referred to as the 'undertaker') intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, the undertaker shall prepare an application for approval of the development to the Board.
- 6.2. Section 182A(9) of the Act states that '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. Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 defines transmission as follows:
- "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.”

6.4. Electric plant is defined as follows:

“any plant, apparatus or appliance used for, or for 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.

6.5. Section 37A(1) states that an application for permission for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule shall be made to the Board under section 37E, provided that; as per Section 37A(2) the development falls within one or more of the following:

- (a) the development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate,
- (b) the development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the National Planning Framework or in any regional spatial and economic strategy in force in respect of the area or areas in which it would be situate,
- (c) the development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

7.0 Assessment

- 7.1.1. The proposed development comprises the provision of a new 110kV electrical substation at the proposed windfarm site and the laying of a 110kV underground cable between the proposed on-site substation and the existing 110kV GIS substation building located within the 400kV ESB Moneypoint Substation Complex in Co. Clare. The configuration of the substation layout is designed to cater for Eirgrid's

future expansion requirements, should it be required to make provision for future grid connections.

- 7.1.2. The prospective applicant is seeking a determination from the Board as to whether the proposal is or is not strategic infrastructure development. The prospective applicant considers that the proposed works are strategic infrastructure development.
- 7.1.3. In deciding whether or not the proposed development is or is not strategic infrastructure development, Section 2 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) provides interpretations except where the context requires otherwise. Strategic infrastructure development means *inter alia* (d) any proposed development referred to in Section 182A(1). Under this Section, an undertaker shall apply to the Board for approval of a development comprising or for the purposes of energy transmission. S182A(9) states that 'transmission' shall be construed in accordance with s2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 and shall also be construed as meaning, *inter alia*, the transport of electricity by means of a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110kV or more. I consider that the proposed substation constitutes 'electrical plant', as defined. There is no threshold under s182A(9) of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 (as amended) in respect of a substation.
- 7.1.4. Transmission shall also be construed in accordance with Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 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 Board¹ 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."

¹ The Board cited above refers to the Electricity Supply Board and the Commission refers to the Commission for Electricity Regulation. EirGrid took over the operation and development of the national grid in 2006.

- 7.1.5. The proposed new substation and associated infrastructure would enable the electricity generated by the planned wind farm at Cahermurphy Two (recently remitted back to the Board following the quashing of the decision to refuse permission in the High Court, ABP-318525-23 refers) to be transformed to a voltage of 110kV for direct transmission to the national grid. The proposed new substation and associated infrastructure would form an integral part of the electricity network with a number of supply connections and possibly some additional generation connections. The prospective applicant has submitted that it is intended that the proposed 110kV substation and underground electrical cabling will be retained as a permanent structure on the network.
- 7.1.6. I note the similarity between this case and other proposals put before the Board for pre-application consultation under s182E of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 (as amended). In these cases, the Board determined that the provision of a new 110kV substation and associated 110kV overground/underground cabling which would connect into the existing transmission system constitutes strategic infrastructure. I consider that the current proposal is comparable, and therefore constitutes strategic development. The prospective applicant should be advised to submit any application for approval of the proposed development to the Board.
- 7.1.7. The Board has also given consideration in previous cases as to whether or not a development in question is of strategic national importance. The long title of the 2006 Act provides for the making directly to An Bord Pleanála of applications for permission for “developments of strategic importance to the State”. Section 37A(2) refers to 7th Schedule development but generally describes strategic infrastructure development as falling within one or more of the following:
- (a) the development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate,
 - (b) the development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the National Planning Framework or in any regional spatial and economic strategy in force in respect of the area or areas in which it would be situate,

- (c) the development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

7.1.8. The National Planning Framework recognises that new energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary to harness the potential of renewable energy. Furthermore, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy supports the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission and distribution networks. The proposed development is deemed to be of a scale or of such importance that would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of the objectives of the NPF and RSES. The proposal will be located fully within the administrative boundary of Clare County Council, and at a remove from any other Local Authority jurisdiction. I would accept that there will be no significant effects on either of these local authorities.

7.1.9. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development as described and to the general description and scale of strategic infrastructure development set out in section 37A(2), I conclude that the proposed development consisting of a 110kV electrical infrastructure and connection to the National Grid at the existing 400kV Moneypoint substation, in townlands between Cahermurphy and Moneypoint, falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Appropriate Assessment (AA)

7.1.10. S182A(2) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) states that 'In the case of development referred to in subsection (1) which belongs to a class of development identified for the purposes of s176, the undertaker shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, an Environmental Impact Assessment report or Natura Impact Statement or both that report and that statement, as the case may be, in respect of the development'. S176 relates to prescribed classes of development requiring assessment.

EIA

7.1.11. Part 1 and Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001, (as amended) set out the classes of development for the purposes of EIA. Section

20 of Part 1 provides that a mandatory EIAR is required for the 'Construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometres'. Section 3 (b) of Part 2 provides that a mandatory EIAR is required for 'Industrial installations carrying gas, steam and hot water with a potential heat output of 300 megawatts or more, or transmission of electrical energy by overhead cables not included in Part 1 of this Schedule, where the voltage would be 200 kilovolts or more'.

- 7.1.12. Therefore, the proposed development of a 110kV substation and underground transmission cables would not come within a class set out in Part 1 or Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001, (as amended).

AA

- 7.1.13. In relation to AA, the substation site is not located within any European site. The grid route however will run along the boundary of the Lower River Shannon SAC and River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA. As such, it was noted that Stage 2 AA will likely be required with the submission of a Natura Impact Statement. The applicant was advised at the pre-application meeting to consult with the NPWS.

Prescribed Bodies

- 7.1.14. In view of the scale, nature, and location of the proposed development, as described in this report, it is recommended that the prospective applicant should consult with the prescribed bodies listed in the attached appendix in respect of any application for approval.

Conclusion

- 7.1.15. I consider that the proposed development as described in the applicant's submission constitutes strategic infrastructure coming within the scope of s182A of the Planning & Development Act 2000, (as amended), therefore necessitating an application to be made directly to the Board.

8.0 Recommendation

I recommend that Mid Clare Renewable Energy Windfarm Ltd. be informed that the proposed development consisting of a 110kV electrical infrastructure and connection to the National Grid at the existing 400kV Moneypoint substation, in townlands between Cahermurphy and Moneypoint, with Options 1, 1a and 2 as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála on the 26th January 2023, and Route Options 1 to 5 as set out in the presentation to the Board at the Pre-Application meeting on the 29th of August, 2023, and the preferred Route Option 4 which was presented to the Board at the second Pre-Application meeting on the 19th of September, 2024, falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning & Development Act 2000, (as amended), and that any planning application should be made directly to the Board.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.



A. Considine

Planning Inspector

13th November 2025

Appendix – Prescribed bodies

The following prescribed bodies should be consulted for the purposes of SID development in accordance with the provisions of s182A(4)(b) of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 (as amended):

- Department of Planning and Local Government and Heritage
- Minister of Climate, Energy and the Environment
- Clare County Council
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Uisce Eireann
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- An Taisce
- Southern Regional Assembly
- HSE, National Environmental Health Service
- The Commission for Regulation of Utilities
- Health & Safety Authority
- ESB
- EirGrid

Further notifications should also be made where deemed appropriate.