



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 315797-23

Development	9 turbine windfarm and associated works
Location	Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands Co. Clare
Prospective Applicant	FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC
Type of Application	Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.
Date of Site Inspection	13/04/23
Inspector	Pauline Fitzpatrick

1.0 Introduction

The Board received a request dated 14th February, 2023 to enter into pre-application consultations under Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, in relation to a proposed development of 9 turbines and associated works including the provision of a 110kV connection to the national grid. The prospective applicant sought closure of the pre-application by correspondence dated 10th October, 2023.

2.0 Site Location and Description

The site which covers an approx. area of 931 hectares is located c. 3km to the south of Broadford, c. 3.5km southwest of Kilkishen and c. 4km northwest of Sixmilebridge in south Clare.

The site comprises of commercial coniferous forestry, biodiversity areas under Coillte management and 3rd party lands.

Land uses in the wider landscape comprise of commercial forestry and agriculture with one off housing along the local road network.

3.0 Proposed Development

The proposed development, as amended by the details provided in the prospective applicant's correspondence accompanying the request to close the pre-application consultation process, comprises the following:

- 9 no. wind turbines each with a capacity of between 5.7MW and 7.2MW. It will have a MEC range of between 51.3MW and 64.8MW. The turbines are to have a blade tip height in the range of 179.5 to 185 metres, a hub height in the range of 102.5 to 110.5 metres and rotor diameter in the range of 149 to 163 metres,
- 110kV substation,
- 105 metre high meteorological mast,
- 5 no. borrow pits,

- Access roads both new and upgrade of existing,
- Recreation and amenity works,
- All ancillary works.

As amended from the detail provided in the original correspondence and at the pre-application consultation meeting, the connection to the national grid via an underground connection from the proposed onsite 110kV electrical substation to Ardnacrusha 110 kV substation will now be subject of a separate Section 182A application (subject of pre-application consultations under ref. ABP 317763-23).

4.0 Planning History/Relevant Cases

ABP 317763-23 - current pre-application consultation with the Board for underground cable grid connection to the Ardnacrusha substation to facilitate the proposed wind farm.

5.0 Applicant's Case

The prospective applicant's case is outlined in a letter (accompanied by maps) which was received with the consultation request dated 14th February 2023, the presentation made to the pre-application consultation meeting held 4th May 2023 and details accompanying the request to close the pre-application consultation process dated 10th October, 2023.

The applicant contends that:

- The development would be of strategic economic and social importance to the state due to the potential to generate a large quantity of electricity to contribute to Ireland's energy targets with significant capital investment required, representing significant economic contribution to the region including provision of community gain proposals.
- It would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of objectives in the National Planning Framework, specifically policy objective 55.

- The proposal is in accordance with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and is specifically supported by regional policy objectives RPOs 87, 95, 98, 99, and 100.
- The development would not have a significant effect on more than one planning authority as it is situated entirely within County Clare.

The prospective applicant concludes that the proposed development comes within the 7th schedule and satisfies two of the three criterion set out in Section 37A(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

6.0 Consultations

1 no. pre-application meeting was held with the prospective applicant on 4th May 2023

The principal matters arising related to:

- Confirmation of number of turbines and output capacity,
- Consideration of impacts for varying turbine design options,
- Details on foundations and hardstanding areas and materials required for construction,
- Residential amenities and separation distances,
- Turbine delivery route,
- Proposed grid connection,
- Watercourses and hydrological considerations,
- Biodiversity considerations including bats and biodiversity areas,
- Landscape and visual impacts,
- Shannon airport flight paths,
- Consultation with prescribed bodies.

7.0 Legislative Provisions

Section 2(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended ('the Act'), defines 'strategic infrastructure' as including, inter alia:

(a) any proposed development in respect of which a notice has been served under section 37B(4)(a),

Section 37A of the Act states that:

(1) An application for permission for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule (inserted by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006) shall, if the following condition is satisfied, be made to the Board under section 37E and not to a planning authority.

(2) That condition is that, following consultations under section 37B, the Board serves on the prospective applicant a notice in writing under that section stating that, in the opinion of the Board, the proposed development would, if carried out, fall within one or more of the following paragraphs, namely—

(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.

The current SID thresholds are set out within the 7th Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The relevant threshold for the proposed project is '*An installation for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (a wind farm) with more than 25 turbines or having a total output greater than 50 megawatts*'.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, transposes Annex I and II of the EIA Directive and sets out prescribed classes of development, for which an environmental impact assessment is required. The following classes are noted:

Part 2 Class 3 (i)

Installations for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (wind farms) with more than 5 turbines or having a total output greater than 5 megawatts

Appropriate Assessment

The nearest Natura 2000 site is Danes Hole, Poulnalecka SAC (site code 00030) c. 380 metres to the north-west of the site at its nearest point.

The applicant intends to submit a Natura Impact Assessment

8.0 Assessment

8.1. Strategic Infrastructure

As clarified by the prospective applicant following the pre-application consultation meeting the proposed development will comprise of 9 turbines each with an output of between 5.7MW and 7.2MW giving a MEC range of between 51.3MW and 64.8MW. A 110kV substation is to form part of the application. An underground cable to provide grid connection to the existing 110kV substation at Ardnacrusha is currently subject of pre-application discussions with the Board as to whether it would come within the provisions of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. It is to be subject of a separate application.

The current SID thresholds are set out within the 7th Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The relevant threshold for the proposed project is 'an installation for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (a wind farm) with more than 25 turbines or having a total output greater than 50 megawatts'. Having regard to the combined generating capacity of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the development accords with Section 37A(1) of the Act.

Accordingly under Section 37A(2), the proposed development must fall within one or more of the following conditions:

(a) the development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate,

The prospective applicant's case is that the proposal satisfies the conditions under 37A(2)(a) of the Act due to the scale of the project which would generate more than 50MW.

The development would be of strategic economic and social importance to the state due to the significant economic contribution to the region and to the country as a whole. The development has the potential to have a significant impact in meeting the State's renewable energy targets, it will meet the objectives of The Climate Action Plan 2023 and it will do so in a sustainable way through the provision of 9 turbines which will be connected to the national grid. The proposed development will assist in meeting national renewable energy targets and will also result in reductions in carbon emissions from electricity generation and reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels.

Having regard to the national and regional policy context and the details of the subject proposal outlined above, I am satisfied that the development would be of strategic economic importance to the State and the Region and would therefore comply with the condition set out in section 37A(2)(a) of the Act.

(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,

The prospective applicant states that the proposed development would contribute to the objectives of the NPF and the provisions of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Regional Assembly. Having reviewed the NPF, I note the following relevant National Policy Objectives (NPOs) which aim to reduce the carbon footprint and promote renewable energy:

- NPO 54: Reduction in the carbon footprint by integrating climate change 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;

- NPO 55: 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.

At a regional level I note that the RSES for the Southern Region and, in particular Objective RPO 99, seeks to support the sustainable development of renewable wind energy (on shore and off shore) at appropriate locations and related grid infrastructure in the Region in compliance with national Wind Energy Guidelines.

Having regard to the above, I am satisfied that the development would meet relevant national policy objectives of the NPF and would serve to fulfil the relevant regional policy objectives of the RSES for the Southern Regional Assembly. The development would, therefore, satisfy the requirement set out in section 37A(2)(b) of the Act.

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

The site is fully contained within the area of one planning authority, Clare County Council. Whilst the site is in relative proximity to the borders of counties Limerick and Tipperary with the potential for visual impacts, I am satisfied that the proposed development will not have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

Accordingly, I am of the opinion that the proposal would not come within the scope of this requirement to be considered as complying with section 37A(2)(c) of the Act.

8.2. Prescribed Bodies

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 future application for approval.

9.0 Recommendation

Based on the foregoing assessment, it can be concluded that the proposed development would exceed the threshold set out in the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and therefore satisfies Section

37A(1) of the Act. It can also be concluded that the development is of strategic importance by reference to the requirements of Section 37A(2)(a) and Section 37A(2)(b) of the Act.

I recommend that the Board serve a notice on the prospective applicant, pursuant to Section 37(B)(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, stating that it is of the opinion that the proposed development constitutes a strategic infrastructure development within the meaning of Section 37A of the Act for the reasons and considerations set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the size, scale and location of the proposed windfarm and related development, and to the policy context, it is considered that the proposed development comprising the development of a 9 turbine windfarm with an overall output of over 50MW with associated infrastructure on a site at Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands in Co. Clare constitutes development that falls within the definition of energy infrastructure in the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, thereby satisfying the requirements set out in Section 37A(1) of the Act.

The proposed development is also considered to be of strategic importance by reference to the requirements of Section 37A(2)(a) and 37A(2)(b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. An application for permission for the proposed development must therefore be made directly to An Bord Pleanála under Section 37E of the Act.



Pauline Fitzpatrick
Senior Planning Inspector

31st October, 2023

Appendix A:

Note 1: The following is a list of prescribed bodies considered relevant for the purposes of section 37E(3)(c) of the Act.

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Development Applications Unit).
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications.
- Tipperary County Council
- Limerick City and County Council
- Southern Regional Assembly
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland.
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Uisce Eireann
- Health Service Executive
- Irish Aviation Authority
- The Commission for Energy Regulation

Further notifications should also be made, where deemed appropriate.