

An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-316466-23

Development	Cooloo Wind Farm consisting of 9 wind turbines with an estimated energy capacity of between 54 and 64.8 MW
Location	Townland of Cloondahamper (Blake), Cloonascragh, Elmhill, Cooloo, Lecarrow, Dangan Eighter, Gorteenlahard, Lissavally and Slievegorm in Co. Galway
Prospective Applicant(s)	Neoen Renewables Ireland Limited
Type of Application	Pre-Application Consultation under Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.
Planning Authority	Galway County Council
Date of Site Inspection	24 th June 2025
Inspector	Donogh O' Donoghue

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Commission received a request dated 26th April 2023 to enter into pre-application consultations under Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, in relation to a proposed wind farm development at Cooloo, County Galway with an estimated generating capacity of between 54 and 64.8 MW.
- 1.2. The prospective applicant sought closure of the pre-application consultation by correspondence dated 22nd August 2025.

2.0 Site Location

- 2.1. The site is located in the townlands of Cloondahamper (Blake), Cloonascragh, Elmhill, Cooloo, Lecarrow, Dangan Eighter, Gorteenlahard, Lissavally and Slievegorm in Co. Galway. The proposed windfarm is located circa 13km southeast of Tuam and circa 10km west of Mountbellow in Co Galway and is accessed via local roads from the R332 and the N63. The village of Brierfield is located approx. 1.3km south of the nearest proposed turbine and the village of Moylough is located approx. 5.3km east of the nearest proposed turbine. The area is rural in nature with low density /one off residential houses along local roads.
- 2.2. The site comprises agricultural lands, flat peatland and commercial coniferous forestry. The Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code – 000297) overlaps with the proposed development site.

3.0 Description of Proposal

- 3.1. The proposed development comprises the following:
 - 9 no. wind turbines with an overall turbine tip height of 180 metres, a rotor blade diameter of 150 - 162 metres, and hub height of 99 - 105 metres, and associated foundations and hard-standing areas,
 - Underground electrical (33kV) and communications cabling,
 - 1 no. temporary construction compound (including site offices and welfare facilities),

- A meteorological mast with a height of 100 metres, security fencing and associated foundation and hard-standing area,
- A new temporary site entrance on the R332 for the provision of construction access,
- 2 no. new site entrance either side of the L6301 Local Road in the townland of Cooloo for the provision of operational access,
- 4 no. new access and egress points to facilitate the crossing of the L6056 Local Road in the townland of Dangan Eighter and L6301 Local Road in the townland of Cooloo and Lecarrow,
- Upgrade of existing site tracks/roads and provision of new site access roads, junctions and hardstand areas,
- A new temporary access road from N63 national road and to R332 Regional Road in the townland of Slievegorm to facilitate the delivery of turbine components and other abnormal sized loads,
- Demolition of an existing derelict house (Area c.61m²) and adjacent outbuilding (c. 36m²) in the townland of Cooloo,
- Peat and Spoil Management Areas,
- Tree felling and hedgerow removal,
- Biodiversity Management and Enhancement Plan measures,
- Site drainage,
- Operational stage site signage, and
- All ancillary works and apparatus.

3.2. The applicant sets out that proposed grid connection (on site 110kV electricity substation and underground grid connection cabling route to the existing Cloon 110kV substation, Co Galway) will be subject to a separate Section 182A application at a later stage (subject of pre-planning consultation under ABP-316477-23).

3.3. The applicant indicates that of the 9 proposed turbines 6 are located within an area identified in the Galway County Development Plan as being 'open to consideration' with the remaining 3 located in an 'area generally discouraged.'

4.0 Planning History

4.1. No relevant planning history.

5.0 Precedent Decisions

5.1. The following table outlines a sample of other SID pre-application determinations for wind farm developments of similar scales decided by the Commission:

ABP Ref.	Location	Development Description	ABP Decision
321507	Galway	11 turbines. Output of 6.0MW and 6.6MW	Is SID
320745	Limerick	17 turbines. Output of 75MW and 95MW	Is SID
320703	Mayo	19 turbines. Output of 70.05MW	Is SID
319601	Waterford	15 turbines. Output of 85.5MW to 108MW	Is SID
319219	Kerry	17 wind turbines. Output of 114MW to 136.8MW	Is SID
319215	Clare	9 wind turbines. Output of 51.3MW and 64.8MW	Is SID
319139	Limerick	9 wind turbines. Output of 54MW	Is SID
318203	Offaly	9 wind turbines. Output of 50.4MW	Is SID
315851	Tipperary	9-10 wind turbines. Greater than 50 MW output.	Is SID
315239	Clare	10 turbines. 60-66 MW output.	Is SID
315864	Mayo	21 wind turbines and gird connection. 72.45 MW output.	Is SID

314798	Kerry and Cork	11 wind turbines and grid connection. To exceed 50 MW output.	Is SID
314271	Meath and Westmeath	8 wind turbines and grid connection. 57.6 MW output.	Is SID

6.0 Pre-Application Consultation Meetings Held

- 6.1. Two pre-application consultation meetings were held between An Coimisiun Pleanála and the prospective applicant. Full details of the meetings and matters discussed are contained in the Commission's records for the meetings.
- 6.2. The first pre-application consultation meeting took place on the 19th June 2023. The principle matters arising related to:
- Policy Context
 - Consideration of links to Natura 2000 sites and Designated sites
 - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
 - Peat stability and drainage issues
 - Proximity of dwellings
 - Forestry felling
 - Ecological Assessments including bat surveys
 - Water and hydrological considerations
 - Engagement with NPWS
 - Turbine delivery route options
 - Community Consultations
- 6.3. A second pre-application consultation meeting took place on the 10th July 2025. The principle matters arising related to:

- Policy Context noting that 3 of the proposed turbines are located within an area identified in the Galway County Development Plan as being 'generally discouraged'
- Proposal may include a battery energy storage facility
- Peat stability and drainage issues
- Forestry felling
- Bird and Bat surveys
- Biodiversity Enhancement
- Turbine delivery routes
- Grid Connection to connect proposed windfarm still under consideration
- Community Consultations

7.0 Legislation

7.1. Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended

7.1.1. 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),

7.1.2. 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 Commission under section 37E and not to a planning authority.

(2) That condition is that, following consultations under section 37B, the Commission serves on the prospective applicant a notice in writing under that section stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, 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.

7.1.3. Class 1 of the Seventh Schedule relates to energy infrastructure and includes the following category of development:

‘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’.

7.2. Environmental Impact Assessment

7.2.1. Section 37E(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended requires that an application for permission for development in respect of which a notice has been served under section 37B(4)(a) shall be made to the Commission and shall be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment report in respect of the proposed development. Therefore, the submission of an EIAR is mandatory.

7.3. Appropriate Assessment

7.3.1. The boundary of the Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code – 000297) overlaps with the proposed development site. The applicant intends to submit a Natura Impact Statement.

8.0 Assessment

8.1. Seventh Schedule Development

8.1.1. The proposed development will comprise of 9 no wind turbines with an estimated generating capacity of between 54 and 64.8 MW.

8.1.2. 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 50MW for wind farms as set out in Class 1 (Energy Infrastructure) of the Seventh Schedule of the Act.

- 8.1.3. Having regard to the proposed output of between 54 and 64.8 MW of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the development accords with Section 37A(1) of the Act.

8.2. Section 37A(2) Criteria

In addition to 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

- 8.2.1. The proposed development will contribute to the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in line with national policies and objectives such as the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended), Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP 24), Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP 25), and Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework - First Revision, April 2025 specifically National Policy Objective 70. I further consider the proposed development would involve significant capital investment in the region and will create employment opportunities relating to the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the development. Additionally, rates will be made payable to Galway County Council by the developer and a Community Benefit Scheme will be put in place. All of these considerations will result in a positive impact on the economic profile of the subject area and investment in the region.

- 8.2.2. 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,

- 8.2.3. It is submitted by the prospective applicant that the proposed development would contribute to the objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the provisions of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) 24, CAP 25, and The Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 (RSES).
- 8.2.4. Having reviewed the NPF - First Revision, I note the following relevant National Strategic Outcome 8 (NSO 8) and National Policy Objectives (NPOs) 69, 70 and 74 which seek to encourage, facilitate and harness renewable energy sources including wind at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050.
- 8.2.5. At a regional level, the Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032 supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the region, stating that the renewable energy needs of the region, in the form of wind, solar and biomass, will be likely to be met in rural areas.
- 8.2.6. The proposal to generate over 50MW of renewable energy by using wind as a resource would assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and would contribute significantly towards the achievement of a low carbon economy.
- 8.2.7. 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 Northern and Western 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.

- 8.2.8. The site is fully contained within the area of one planning authority, Galway County Council. Whilst the site is in relative proximity to the border of county Roscommon 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.
- 8.2.9. 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.

8.3. Prescribed Bodies

- 8.3.1. 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.

Note: The prospective application should be advised to submit a standalone document (which may form part of the EIAR) with the planning application, which outlines the mitigation measures, in the interest of convenience and ease of reference.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. 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.
- 9.2. I recommend that the Commission 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

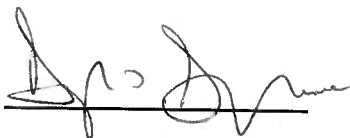
Having regard to the size, scale and location of the proposed windfarm development and related development, and to the policy context, it is considered that the proposed development comprising the development of 9 no wind turbines with an estimated generating capacity of between 54 and 64.8 MW. on a site in the townlands of Cloondahamper (Blake), Cloonascragh, Elmhill, Cooloo, Lecarrow, Dangan Eighter, Gorteenlahard, Lissavally and Slievegorm in Co. Galway 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 Coimisiun Pleanála under Section 37E of the Act.

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 handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donogh O' Donoghue', written over a horizontal line.

Donogh O' Donoghue

Planning Inspector

Date: 12th September 2025

Appendix – Prescribed bodies

- Department of Planning and Local Government and Heritage
- Minister of Environment and Climate & Communications
- Galway County Council
- Roscommon County Council
- The Northern and Western Regional Assembly
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)
- The Heritage Council
- Fáilte Ireland
- An Taisce
- Uisce Éireann
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Irish Aviation Authority
- Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- HSE
- The Commission for Regulation of Utilities
- Office of Public Works

Further notifications should also be made, where deemed appropriate.