



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-317901-23

Development	Proposed 220kV loop in substation to connect to Eirgrid transmission network and underground grid connection to proposed solar farm.
Location	Mulhussey Townland, Kilclone, Co Meath.
Prospective Applicant(s)	GP Joule Ireland Limited.
Type of Application	Pre-Application consultation under 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.
Planning Authority	Meath County Council.
Date of Site Inspection	29 th September 2023
Inspector	Brid Maxwell

1.0 Overview

- 1.1** On the 28th August 2023 the Board received a request to enter into pre-application consultation under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended ("the Act") in relation to the proposed development of a 220kV loop in substation to connect to the existing Maynooth-Gorman 220kV line. The proposed development is to facilitate the connection of the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm to the Eirgrid transmission network.
- 1.2** A virtual meeting was held with the prospective applicant on the 16th October 2023. Closure of the pre-application consultation was requested in correspondence dated 5th of January 2024, and received by the Board on the same date. A record of the meeting is attached to the file. The presentation made to the Board's representatives at the meeting is also attached to the file.
- 1.3** This Report provides an overview of the proposed development, the legislative provisions, relevant precedents and recommends that the Board determine that the proposed development does fall within the scope of section 182A of the Act. A recommended list of Prescribed Bodies that should be forwarded copies of the application is included in Appendix A.

2.0 Site Location:

- 2.1** The site of the proposed substation is located within the townland of Mulhussey approximately 4.3km to the north east of Kilcock in County Meath. The site lies approximately 1.2km east of the R125 and is within a predominantly flat agricultural (arable) field surrounded by mature hedgerows to the north of the local road L6217 from which it takes its access. A cul de sac serving agricultural and residential development runs along the western site boundary. The site is traversed, in a north south direction, by the existing Maynooth – Gorman 220kV line also incorporating two tower structures. There are existing land drains along the site boundary and also traversing the site.

2.2 The proposed substation site is located within the footprint of the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm. The local area is characterised by agricultural arable land use with some commercial enterprises and residential dwellings also featuring. Mulhussey National school is located within a kilometer to the east. A number of features of historical and archaeological interest are noted in the locality including the following recorded monuments ME01986 Field system Milltown, ME04511 Enclosure: Mulhussey, ME01973 Church Mulhussey, ME-03840 Graveyard: Mulhussey, ME03841 Moated Site: Mulhussey and ME01974 Castle – tower house Mulhussey. A group of protected structures at Larchill Arcadian Gardens a *ferme ornée* including house, farm buildings, lake and follies are located to the west. NIAH 14404907 Larchill House and Farmyard Complex, 14404905 Larchill House Country House, 14404908 Larchill House Folly and 144040904 Larchill House Mausoleum. The nearest European sites are the Rye Water Valley Carton SAC (Site Code 001398) c5.5km to the south east and River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code 002299) and River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (Site Code 004232) circa 12.8km to the northwest.

3. Description of Proposal:

3.1 The proposed development comprises of a (220kV) GIS (Gas Insulated Switchgear) building which will loop into the existing Maynooth Gorman 220kV line which traverses the site. Ancillary development includes a temporary construction compound and access track for installation of substation and a new permanent access track for the proposed loop in substation. Two in situ pylon structures will be removed and replaced with new towers and cable gantrys to facilitate the development. The layout plan submitted by the prospective applicant also indicates proposed diversion of existing land drains.

3.2 The proposed 220kV substation will be made up of a GIS building, transformer compound, MV switchgear building and battery storage compound. The transformer, cable chair and structural steelwork will be installed within the transformer compound which will be surrounded by security fencing.

3.3 The proposal relates to the connection of the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm to the Eirgrid transmission network.

4.0 Planning History.

Proposed Blackhall Solar Farm 231144 Pre Validation as per details on eplanning.ie/MeathCC/searchresults accessed on 8/01/2024. Proposed development will consist of a 10 year permission for the construction of and 40 year operation and subsequent decommissioning of a development consisting of a 205.15 hectare solar farm and underground grid connection route.

5.0 Precedent Decisions:

5.1 In terms of similar, recent precedent cases I refer the Board to the following:

ABP-315433-22	Kildare	Proposed development of a 220kV Air Insulated (AIS) tail fed substation with associated grid connection comprising 220kV underground cabling to connect to existing 400/220kV Dunnstown substation.	SID
ABP-315430-22	Kildare	Proposed 110kV electrical substation and grid connection options to the existing transmission network at Maganey solar farm, Co Kildare	SID
ABP-313613-22	Cork	110kV substation and grid connection along with associated infrastructure in respect of permitted solar farm development, Ballinrea, Co Cork.	SID
ABP-315972	Louth	Proposed 2 no 110kV substations and grid connection in lieu of 2 number 37kV substations and grid connection granted by Louth County Council (Planning Ref 21/61) to facilitate permitted solar and battery storage system development and proposed extensions	SID
ABP313042	Roscommon	110kV electrical substation and grid connection. Monkstown, Athlone. Co Roscommon,	SID
ABP-315128	Offaly Laois	Proposed development of 110kV electrical substation and grid connection at Trascaun and Cloondoolusk, Portarlinton.	SID
ABP-313693	Tipperary	Proposed 110kV substation with connection to national grid via 110kV overhead line and associated works, Chancellorstown, Co Tipperary	SID
ABP-315383-22	Kilkenny	Proposed 110kV substation and electrical cable connection and 2 no cable end masts, Castlegarden and Cloghscregg, Co Kilkenny.	SID

ABP-314595-22	Westmeath	110kV Loop-in Loop out substation. Clonardis Co Westmeath.	SID
ABP-314739-22	Fingal	Proposed development of a new 110kV substation, Belinstown Swords Co Dublin	SID
ABP-313090-22	Fingal	220kV electrical substation and 220kV underground cable transmission line. Lands at Kilshane Road, Kilshane, Finglas, Dublin 11.	SID
ABP-310033-21	Kildare	220kV substation and grid connection at existing Dunnstown 400kV substation.	SID
ABP-311020-21	Meath	220kV substation and associated grid connection to Maynooth-Gorman 220KV line.	SID
ABP-311276-21	Westmeath	220kV Gas Insulated Swithgear (GIS) substation with loop-in loop-out connection to national grid, Kiltotan & Collinstown, Rochfortbridge Co. Westmeath.	SID
VC009-303412-19	Kildare	220 kV electricity substation, 2 no. 220 KV circuits forming a loop-in/loop out to the existing Maynooth-Woodland 220 kV Overhead Line and 3 no. 220 kV circuits connecting the proposed substation to electricity transformers.	SID
VC17-301188-18	Meath	220kV substation and associated works on lands at Portan, Gunnocks, Loughsallagh and Clonee, to the north of Clonee Village, Co. Meath	SID

6.0 Pre-Application Consultation Meetings Held

- 6.1 A virtual meeting was held with the prospective applicant on the 16th October 2023. (Record attached) The prospective applicant provided a description of the proposed development outlining that the rationale for the proposed substation is to connect the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm. The prospective applicant outlined details of preliminary environmental investigations which have informed the location and layout of the proposed development.
- 6.2 The prospective applicant outlined the view that the proposed development qualifies as a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) by reference to Section 182(A)(9) "the transport of electricity by means of (a) high voltage line where the voltage would be 110kilovolts or more; or (b) an interconnector where ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not."
- 6.3 The prospective applicant noted that initial assessment predicts that the proposal can be screened out for EIA and an EIAR will not be required and requested that the Board address this issue.

7. Legislation

Section 182A (1) of the Act provides that:

"Where a person, (hereafter referred to in this section 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 the development under section 182B and shall apply to the Board for such approval accordingly."

Subsection 9 of the Act defines 'transmission' in relation to electricity, as being "...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."

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" in relation to electricity 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, (b) a meter used for ascertaining the quantity of electricity supplied to any premises, or (c) an electrical appliance under the control of a consumer.”

8.0 Assessment

8.1 The proposal comprises a new 220kV ‘Loop-In’ substation, which is to facilitate a proposed solar farm subject to current application with Meath County Council pursuant to Section 34 of the PDA 2000, as amended (Planning Ref 231144). 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. I consider that the proposed substation constitutes ‘electrical plant’ as defined under Section 7.0 above in that it is plant for connecting the proposed Blackhall Solar Farm to the national grid. I note that two existing pylon structures are proposed to be removed and replaced with new towers and cable gantrys to facilitate the development. The new substation and associated infrastructure will form part of the existing transmission system and will form a new node on the existing Maynooth-Gorman 220kV circuit and therefore part of the transmission grid. I note the similarity between this case and other proposals put before the Board for pre-application consultation under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. In these cases, the Board determined that the provision of a new 220kV substation and associated overground/underground cabling which is to be looped into the existing transmission system constitutes strategic infrastructure.

8.2. Within the submissions from the prospective applicant outlined an initial prediction that the proposed 220kV substation and associated development can be screened out for EIA as the proposed development is not of a relevant class of development specified in Schedule 5 Parts 1 and 2 of the Regulations. The

Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide a robust and comprehensive justification in terms of preliminary screening for EIA having regard to the cumulative assessment with the associated solar development.

8.3 Regarding Appropriate Assessment as the site is hydrologically connected to the Rye Water Valley / Carton Special Area of Conservation (Site Code 001698) the prospective applicant indicated that it is their intention to include an NIS with the application also to consider in combination effects with regard to the proposed solar farm development which is considered to be appropriate.

8.4. In conclusion, I consider that the proposed 220kV Loop-In substation 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 directly to the Board.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 I recommend that the prospective applicant GP Joule Ireland Limited be notified that the proposed development consisting of a 220 kV substation and the associated works as described in the plans, particulars and correspondence documents received by the Board on the 28th August 2023 and 16th October 2023 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.



Bríd Maxwell
Planning Inspector
10th January 2024

Appendix A – list of prescribed bodies

The following list identifies the prescribed bodies which are considered relevant in this instance for the purposes of Section 182A(4)(b) of the Act.

- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,
- Minister of the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Meath County Council
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy
- An Taisce
- The Heritage Council
- Fáilte Ireland
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)
- Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Eirgrid

Further notifications should also be made where deemed appropriate.