



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-318759-23

Development	Proposed development of a 110kV Substation and associated works.
Location	Townland of Clonymeath, Summerhill, Co. Meath. (www.clonymeathsubstation.ie)
Planning Authority	Meath County Council
Applicant(s)	Tom Bruton.
Type of Application	S182A(1) Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended).
Planning Authority Decision	N/A
Submissions	Meath County Council Development Applications Unit (DAU), Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII); Health Service Executive (HSE)
Date of Site Inspection	26 th July 2024
Inspector	Deirdre MacGabhann

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Appended EIA Pre-Screening Form and EIA Screening Determination.

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The 2.4ha development site is situated c.1km to the northeast of the centre of Summerhill, in the townland of Clonymeath, County Meath. It lies c.8km southeast of Trim and c. 18km south of Navan.
- 1.2. The site is situated in a large agricultural field, which at the time of site inspection comprised pasture. The field is bound to the west, north and east with mature hedgerows. To the south is the Clonymeath River flowing in an east to west direction. It is separated from the agricultural field by a bank, which is broken in places. There is evidence of animal poaching in the Clonymeath River. To the south of the river is a mature coniferous plantation. To the west of the site is an unnamed OPW watercourse. The agricultural field is low lying, and the topography of the site rises away from Clonymeath River. An existing OHL, the Mullingar-Corduff 110kV OHL, crosses the southern part of the development site. The Summerhill wastewater treatment plant lies to the southwest of the site, also to the south of the River.
- 1.3. Access to the site is currently via a private lane, off the minor county road to the northeast of the site. The site is difficult to see from the public road network that surrounds the site, including from the R158, R156 and local road L-2210 to the east of the site. This is due to a mix of substantial roadside banks, hedgerows, treelines and roadside development.
- 1.4. Nearest residential properties lie to the southeast and southwest of the site. Approximately 600m to the southeast of the site and separated from it by coniferous woodland is Spring Valley House. It is a Protected Structure and the house, and the limestone gate piers, are listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. The gardens are listed in National Built Heritage Service's Garden Survey. Approximately 650m to the southwest is a residential estate to the northeast of Summerhill. It is separated from the site by substantial hedgerows and the same coniferous plantation. The Hill of Tara is located c.12km to the northeast of the site.

2.0 Proposed Development

2.1. The proposed development comprises a ten-year permission for the construction of a 110kV substation, electrical connection to the national grid and associated works and services. The application to the Board is made to the board under section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), on foot of pre-application consultations with the Board under ABP-310076-21, where it was determined that the development comprised strategic infrastructure.

2.2. The development will facilitate connection of the consented 91.9ha Clonmeath Solar Farm (PA ref. 21/546; ABP-311760-21) to the national grid via the existing Mullingar-Corduff 110kV OHL¹. The solar farm site lies to the north and east of the substation site. Once constructed, the proposed substation will remain a permanent element of the transmission network, maintained by EirGrid and under their ownership. The proposed permanent 110kV electrical substation includes the following elements:

- Two no. single storey control buildings (one EirGrid control building and one IPP control building), both with welfare facilities, associated electrical plant and apparatus, entrance gates, underground cabling, wastewater holding tank, rainwater harvesting and site drainage. Two options are proposed for the IPP control building, Option A c.11m x c.10m single storey block-built structure; Option B c.6.9m x c.12.2m containerised unit.
- The substation compound includes outdoor Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) equipment and associated electrical plant and equipment.
- The installation of 4 no. new 110kV overhead cable interface towers, with a height of c.13m, with 2 no. installed under the existing OHL and 2 no. towers to support a new section of the OHL. The new overhead line grid connection will require the decommissioning/ removal of c.60m of existing 110kV OHL and the installation of c.171.6m of new 110kV OHL to facilitate the new 'loop in/loop out' arrangement (with no underground cabling).

¹ It is stated in the application documents that, due to the recent energisation of Blundelstown substation, this OHL may sometimes be referred to as the 'Mullingar-Blundelstown 110kV line'.

- Extension of the internal access tracks, permitted under PA ref. 21/546; ABP-311760-21, to provide access to the substation compound, control buildings and battery compound (see Site Layout Overview, drawing 402-01), to include:
 - Additional track, c.40m, gate in fence to access EirGrid building and substation compound.
 - Additional track, c.30m to access IPP compound.
 - Additional track, c.50m to access battery compound.
 - Realignment of fencing along IPP access track.
 - Relocation of track within battery compound from south to north end of the compound.
- Access to the permitted Solar Farm and its associated access tracks is from the public road (L-2210-0) c.940m to the east of the development site. As part of PA ref. 21/546; ABP-311760-21, the existing entrance to agricultural land will be removed and a new entrance created, with appropriate sightlines (90mx2.4m), c.30m to the northeast of the existing entrance (see Permitted Sightline and Entrance Details, Drawing, 301-02).
- An extension of the temporary construction compound, permitted under PA ref. 21/546; ABP-311760-21, located at the northern boundary of the substation site (see Site Layout Overview, drawing 402-01). The construction compound will include temporary site offices, staff facilities, storage area, concrete pit, bunded fuelling area, car parking areas for staff and visitors. Power will be provided using a diesel or petrol driven generator. The compound will be used as storage and laydown area for various materials/solar array components. Foul sewage from temporary facilities will be routed to covered watertight tanks, with no outlet and will be managed and serviced on a weekly basis, as required by a licenced waste contractor. Domestic waste will be stored on site in enclosed skips and disposed of periodically at a licensed facility. Two 2000 litre diesel tanks will be located within a bunded site compound and designed to be watertight and of sufficient volume to contain 110% of the volume of the largest tank. All refuelling will be carried out in the bunded area. Water use for construction will be very low and will be brought to the site by tanker. Concrete trucks will not be washed out on site but at the batching plant. A section of the temporary construction compound will be reused to house the permitted modular battery energy storage system (see

Temporary Construction Compound, Drawing 507-01 and Site Layout Overview, drawing 402-01).

- Ancillary infrastructure and equipment to include:
 - Palisade security fencing around the substation site and battery storage area (c.2.6m high), concrete post perimeter fencing (c.1.4m high), surrounding the substation compound (set outside of the palisade fencing), and deer fencing at the entrance to the substation compound.
 - Installation of 4 no. CCTV poles (c.4.09m high, Fence and CCTV Details, Drawing 503-02), 10 no. lighting arresters (masts/ monopoles, c.18m high, Substation Compound Layout Drawing 405-00); and c.28 no. lighting columns (c.3m high, Substation Compound Layout, Drawing 405-00, Substation Compound Elevations, Drawing 406-00).
 - It is stated that the camera poles to be placed around the substation and battery compound will be orientated away from external landowners and dwellings. Further, as the site will be mostly unmanned during the operational period, it is stated that there is no requirement for permanent exterior lighting. Illumination for the EirGrid/ESB and IPP compounds will need manual activation (e.g. during prolonged maintenance/fault) and a sensor-based light will be installed at Control Building doors, activating briefly for c.2 minutes solely if the substation is accessed during the nighttime.
 - The overall substation area will be c.1.3ha and a minimum gap of 10m from site fencing or infrastructure to all river/stream boundaries.

2.3. It is stated in the planning application form that water usage within the operational site will be low, with the site typically unmanned and operated remotely. Operational water supply will be by contract (drinking water) and rainwater harvesting (toilet cisterns). All foul water generated, from both IPP and EirGrid Control Buildings will be discharged to an on-site holding tank which will be emptied periodically with the waste removed off-site and discharged at a suitable treatment facility. Surface water drainage will consist of a mix of piped and channel drainage, surface water manholes and an oil sensitive bund dewatering system (Site Layout Detail 1:500, Substation Drainage Layout, Typical Transformer Bund & Plinth Details), designed to collect surface water runoff from roofs of the control buildings and

hardstanding/bunded areas. To comply with best practice, a standard SuDS solution will be used to restrict stormwater runoff to 14.99l/s/ha having regard to 1:100 year flood events, in line with the recommendations of the GDSDS, with minimal alteration of the existing current drainage pattern associated with hardstanding areas.

2.4. The construction phase of the substation is estimated to be for c.50 weeks with most of the site constructed before the Solar Farm, with the exception of the permitted Solar Farm entrance, access track and temporary access track, shared with the permitted Solar Farm.

2.5. Application documentation includes the planning application form, site and newspaper notices, notices to prescribed bodies, plans and drawings and the following reports:

- Planning Report.
- Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- EIA Screening Report.
- Ecological Impact Assessment.
- Natura Impact Statement.
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
- Traffic, Transport and Access Report.
- Noise Report.
- Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment.
- Site Lighting Technical Note (including preliminary lighting design report).
- Geology and Hydrogeology assessment.
- Stage 3, Flood Risk Assessment.

3.0 Submissions

3.1. Prescribed Bodies

3.2. On the 20th December 2023, the applicant circulated the planning application to the following prescribed bodies:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| • TII. | • Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DAU). |
| • HSE. | • Inland Fisheries Ireland. |
| • Failte Ireland. | • The Heritage Council. |

- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications.
- Commission for Regulation of Utilities.
- Meath County Council.
- An Taisce.
- Irish Water.

I also note that the OPW were consulted during the preparation of the Flood Risk Assessment Report.

3.3. Submissions have been received from the following:

- DAU (Archaeology) – Broadly agree with the findings of the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (CHIA) and Archaeological Impact Assessment. Recommend conditions for any grant of permission.
- DAU (Nature Conservation) – Accept the conclusions of the EIAR² and NIS, and consider that with the implementation of mitigation measures, no significant impacts on water quality and European sites will arise. Recommends a condition requiring a CEMP to be submitted for written approval, to incorporate all mitigation measures set out in the EIAR and NIS.
- TII – Refer the Board to Chapter 3 of the DoECLG *Spatial Planning and National Road Guidelines* in the assessment and determination of the planning application.
- HSE – No observations.

3.4. Planning Authority

3.5. Meath County Council's Planning Report (23rd February 2024), describes the proposed development, the site location, relevant planning history, national, regional and local policy, internal reports, and provides the following comments on the development:

- Planning history. Request the Board to consider the relevant conditions applied in respect of developments in the area of the site (see planning history) and the potential for cumulative effects.

² NB The applicant has submitted an EIA Screening Report and Ecological Impact Assessment, not an EIAR.

- Pre-planning. If permission is granted, recommend the appointment of a Community Liaison Officer for the development.
- Planning Assessment:
 - a. *Principle.* Development is situated in a rural area designated 'RA' and is within the categories of development permitted in the designation, is necessary to support the permanent supply of solar generated electricity to the grid, is consistent with Chapter/ Section 6 of Meath County Development Plan (MCDP) 2021-2027 and Climate Action Plan 2023 and in the context of the permitted development (solar farm), is acceptable in principle. No details included on whether development will be undertaken as a statutory undertaker followed by ownership transfer to ESB.
 - b. *Design and layout*
 - State that the substation will not form a new node in the transmission network and question if it will serve Derryclare solar farm.
 - Question whether the IPP building structure be decided prior to commencement of development; provided to PA for written agreement; and/or a subsequent planning application be required to alter the structure.
 - The Board may require FI in respect of cumulative effects (see landscape and visual assessment below).
 - Clarify minor differences between the NIS and Planning report regarding the length of OHL to be removed and installed.
 - Any permission should include conditions requesting that the applicant submit a suitable public lighting scheme to the PA for agreement, require materials and finishes for the proposed buildings, fencing etc. to reflect rural location and lighting and CCTV, to be agreed with PA.
 - c. *Traffic & Transportation* – Traffic & Transportation section have no objections. Notes that there are no proposals for parking of operational traffic.
 - d. *Cultural heritage and Archaeology* – Recommend further information in relation to the CHIA to address:
 - Survey anomalies in vicinity of ME043-007 (church and graveyard) that included a probable deserted medieval/post medieval village,
 - Blanket trial trench testing (to raise trenched percentage to c.12%) in addition to the rescue excavations of AAP27 and AAP71. Blanket

testing to work around previous trenching and power lines. Should remains be discovered, rescue excavation in advance of construction to be required, otherwise no construction monitoring to be required.

- Clarification of mitigation proposals in respect of CH23, 24 and 25. Impact of solar farm on CH23 unclear. Site should be archaeologically tested in advance of construction to determine significance and appropriate mitigation. The sites should be preserved *in situ* or recorded with methodology clarified so accidental damage is avoided.
 - A survey of Cloneymeath Bridge (CH34) and former farm pump (CH28) should be included in CHIA, and
 - A written, sketched and photographic record of the above ground remains of townland boundaries (CH29-32) is required in case of damage during construction.
- e. *Flooding risk assessment and management of surface water drainage* – PA Environment (Flooding and Surface Water) Department is satisfied that the development will not be impacted by flooding. Surface water arrangements are acceptable. If permission is granted recommend that issue is addressed to satisfaction of PA in advance of construction. OPWs comments in relation to drainage channels should inform the Board's conditions.
- f. *Water and wastewater* – Board to consider any recommendations by Irish Water.
- g. *Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)* – The environmental assessments refer to all other development within 5km but do not list the applications. Invite the Board to consider a range of projects in the area in its assessment and seek FI from the applicant.
- h. *Appropriate Assessment* – Invite the Board to consider timing and age of the field survey, undertaken in the winter, 3 years ago. Requests that the Board include Summerhill wastewater treatment plant in the assessment of in-combination effects (AA screening and NIS). If permission is granted, request condition to seek implementation of all mitigation measures identified in NIS as part of the CEMP and conditions for the management of the importation of invasive species or any found on site.

- i. *Ecological Impact Assessment* – Individual surveys for specific mammals e.g. bats, are not included in the EclA. Invite the Board to consider whether further studies are necessary.
- j. *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* – Refer to the findings of the LVIA and absence of visibility of substation in any of viewpoints presented despite solar panels being visible in many locations. Having regard to the height of the 18m lighting masts, 13.1m interface towers and c.6.6-6.8m buildings relative to the solar panel frames, the Board should request FI in this regard, with other viewpoints potentially considered.

Board should consider requesting cumulative landscape and visual impacts of adjoining and recently permitted solar farms (not presented in LVIA), including PA ref. 21985/ABP-212214 (solar farm Culmullin) and PA ref. 21985/ABP-312723 (Derryclare Solar Farm). This should include view from Hill of Tara (Views and Prospects no. 44, Meath CDP).

If permission granted, invite Board to condition wildflower seeds to be collected from the local area/or land allowed to recolonise naturally, and maintenance of lighting/avoidance of light spill.

- k. *Geology and Hydrogeology* – If permission is granted recommend that mitigation and monitoring proposals in technical report are conditioned.
- l. *Other*
 - Noise – Question whether the noise monitoring carried out in 2020 (during Covid) is sufficient. If permission is granted recommend that the comments by Environment section, in relation to the solar farm development, are included.
 - CEMP/Waste management – Invite the Board to consider the conditions recommended for the solar farm development. Mitigation measures should include environmental clerk of works to oversee implementation of mitigation measures.
 - Decommissioning – If permission is granted, conditions should include a decommissioning plan to be agreed with the PA.
- m. *Development contributions* – The proposed infrastructure is not subject to development contributions. Invite the Board to consider the conditions applied to the solar farm development. Recommend conditions which provide

a mechanism for the identification of environmental community projects and payment of a contribution for the funding of these.

- n. *Schedule of conditions* – Recommend a schedule of conditions should permission be granted.

3.6. Third Party Observations

- 3.6.1. There are no third-party observations in respect of the development.

3.7. Responses

On the 27th February, 2024, the Board invited the applicant to comment on the submissions made.

Comments on MCC submission:

- Planning history – The projects identified for cumulative impact assessment are limited to those within 5km of the proposed development.
- Pre-planning – The applicant supports the appointment of a Community Liaison Officer (details of CLO on SID website www.clonymeathsubstation.ie).
- Planning Assessment
 - a. *Principle* – There is no requirement in S182A for the applicant to be a statutory undertaker (reference to undertaker only). No special rights are required that might be afforded to a statutory undertaker. Post commissioning, the new electrical asset will be transferred to EirGrid.
 - b. *Design and layout* –
 - Node - The proposed sub-station will comprise a new node 110kV on the transmission system. Any future connection to the sub-station e.g. Derryclare solar farm, would be a matter for EirGrid. It is noted that the applicant for Derryclare solar farm has applied for a separate substation at Woodtown, Culmullin.
 - The applicant supports a condition which would require written agreement regarding the specific building structure to be identified, before commencement. Two IPP buildings were assessed to accommodate potential design variations within the planning consent, if granted.
 - Sufficient information and evidence of cumulative impact assessment has been submitted to allow consideration of relevant planning matters. This

includes consideration in the NIS, EcIA, LVIA, CHIA, traffic and transport assessment, flood risk assessment and planning report.

- There are no proposals for public lighting. The proposed development is entirely within private lands. The only lighting foreseen is for emergency access for operation or maintenance purposes.
 - Minor differences in application documents (NIS and Planning report regarding the length of OHL to be removed and installed) are typographical and inconsequential. Primary point of reference is the 1:500 plan drawings and development description as set out in notices. DAU accepted the conclusions of the NIS.
 - There is limited scope to condition materials and finishes, as all items must meet EirGrid functional specifications.
- c. *Traffic & Transportation* – Whilst not marked, the Substation Compound Layout Drawing 405 shows turning areas, which could accommodate parking spaces (see page 12 of response for details).
- d. *Cultural heritage and Archaeology* –
- Probable deserted village - Features referred to are within the solar farm site and will not be impacted by the proposed development. Cumulative impacts have been thoroughly assessed. The archaeology referenced in the adjacent consented solar farm (PA ref. 21546, ABP-311760) is protected by condition no. 9 of the permission. There is extensive licensed archaeological testing ongoing in relation to compliance with the condition.
 - Blanket, trial testing to 12% – Blanket licensed geophysical survey carried out of substation site and consented solar farm. Trial testing of 8.5% of site area completed, as well as 5 trial pits within substation site and 5 within consented access track, and no archaeology encountered. Where geophysical testing is completed, the % testing required on site is reduced. 12% testing is contrary to other non-road schemes in Meath (as agreed with PA and NMS), where it has been agreed to reduce % testing where geophysical survey already done. However, applicant has no objection to further licenced testing of substation

footprint in advance of construction and this would remove the requirement for monitoring during construction.

- Mitigation proposals – CH23 and CH24 are not within the development site, but the adjoining consented solar farm and protected by condition no. 9 (see above). CH25 is not within either development site footprint (omitted from development site during pre-planning assessments).
 - Clonmeath Bridge (CH34) and former farm pump (CH28) – CH34 is 100m north of consented site entrance and c.900m from development site. It is not a protected structure, has been extensively renovated and accommodates >1000 trucks and buses/week. There is no evidence of the former farm pump, which has been replaced by a modern concrete farmyard with modern pumped water supply, predating current ownership. Both items were included in the CHIA as part of a desk-based inventory of cultural heritage in the area.
 - Townland boundaries – The CHIA did include a general recommendation that '*preventative measures should be taken to ensure no accidental damage during construction will occur*', and this would cover townland boundaries.
- e. *EIA* – See above comments on assessment of cumulative effects. Also considered in the EIA Screening report (section 3.5.1.2).
- f. *Appropriate Assessment* –
- Timing of survey - Addressed in section 2.4 of the NIS. Substation site is occupied by improved agricultural grassland. Experienced field surveyor did not consider the seasonal constraint to be a significant impediment to assessing potential effects on European sites. Landowner confirms that the management of the improved agricultural grassland has not changed. There will have been no significant changes to the nature conservation value of the site and no changes to potential effects on European sites.
 - WWTW – DHLGH/NPWS accept the conclusions of the NIS. The Ecological consultant considers that the WWTP is operational and below capacity, inclusion of its in-combination effects would not

negatively affect the conservation objectives of the SAC and would not have altered the conclusions of the NIS.

- Implementation of mitigation measures – Noted by application.
- g. *Ecological Impact Assessment* – Given the habitats present on site and the potential effects of the substation on mammals, specialist mammal surveys were not considered necessary. No mammal surveys were deemed necessary for the much larger consented solar farms (Clonmeath and Derryclare). There will be no removal or modification of field boundaries or water courses that bats may forage along. The substation will not form a barrier to commuting bats. No significant change in context (existing overhead cables and supporting polesets). The substation will not have any permanent lighting.
- h. *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* – As demonstrated in the LVIA, neither the current 18m high timber polesets or the proposed infrastructure at the substation site are visible from any VRP, due to relative elevation of solar farm and substation, vegetation screening the substation site, distance of receptors from the development site and intervening vegetation. Cumulative impacts are assessed in the LVIA, including on the Hill of Tara and View Prospect 44 (>11km from the development site).
- i. *Geology and Hydrogeology* – A condition in respect of implementing mitigating and monitoring conditions is noted and considered to be standard.
- j. *Other*
 - Noise – Noise data from a potentially quieter period as a baseline provides a more conservative assessment. An updated noise assessment would be of no benefit (large distance from receptors, negligible impact already assessed on residential receptors off the more conservative baseline).
 - CEMP/Waste management – Recommended conditions are standard.
- k. *Development contributions* – It is not clear why conditions in relation to the solar farm consent should be relevant to the proposed development.
- l. *Recommended conditions* – The applicant comments on these separately
 - No. 3 (finishes) – There is limited scope to condition materials and finishes (see above).

- No. 10 (public lighting) – None proposed (see above).
- No. 11 (no trees/hedgerows to be removed in nesting season) – There is no hedgerow removal proposed within the development site. Site entrance is already consented under PA ref. 21546.
- No. 12 (landscaping) – There is no landscaping or landscape screening proposed within the development boundary.
- No. 13 (archaeology) – See above.
- No. 26 (construction & operational noise) – The nearest receptor to the construction site is 679m and predicted noise levels is <45dBA so noise monitoring is not recommended. However, no objection to noise limits and monitoring during construction. Annual noise monitoring survey is not warranted given large distance from receptors and the negligible impact predicted off a conservative baseline.
- No. 30 & 32 (compliance with regulations for import of soil/stone etc.) – Stone is required for construction of hardcore areas within the site, to be sourced from licensed quarry operators only. It is not reasonable that importation of such stone should be subject to a waste facility permit. No waste material will be imported to the development site.
- No. 31 (vibration, construction) – There is negligible vibration impact (0.2mm/s at any receptor/house) given confined development site, limited construction activity and distance to receptors.
- No. 33 (stockpiling of material during operation) – There will be some storage of construction materials during the construction period only.
- No. 38 & no. 40 (decommissioning and deposit for reinstatement on cessation) – As stated the substation will become a permanent part of the national transmission network.
- No. 39 (development contribution) – Substation infrastructure is not subject to development contributions under MCC Development Contribution Scheme 2024-2029.
- No. 41 (identification of community projects/community liaison committee) – The recommended condition is not relevant to the proposed development, and more appropriate for the consented solar

farm. The proposed condition is also inconsistent with government and SEAI's guidance for the disbursement of funds.

Comments on DAU submission:

- Archaeology – Recommended condition considered to be acceptable.
- Underwater Archaeology – The CHIA recommends that a wade and metal detection survey where bridge span works occur within 10m of watercourses AAP32 and AAP33 and 10m either side. There are no watercourses within 10m of the planning application boundary and no instream works proposed within or immediately proximal to the development area. The potential archaeology AAP32 and AAP33 are water crossings within the consented sola farm site. However, these matters can be addressed via pre-construction UAIA if necessary.
- Nature Conservation – The conditions proposed are noted and acceptable. The CEMP will be submitted to the PA prior to commencement, outline best practice measures for construction and incorporate all mitigation measures set out in the NIS. The submission refers to an EIA, however an EIA screening report was submitted with the planning application.

Comments on TII submission:

- DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads – A detailed Traffic, Transport and Access Report has been submitted, in line with NRA Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines. It includes baseline monitoring of traffic volumes and impact of construction and operational traffic. The Traffic and Transport Assessment is sub-threshold and was carried out on an advisory basis only. The temporary additional traffic from construction does not exceed 5% of the traffic flow on the adjoining road or at junctions and the impact would not be significant. Sufficient detailed information has been provided to allow the PA to conclude that there is no significant increase in the volume of traffic using a national road and there are no physical works on any national road.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. The following planning applications/developments are permitted in the immediate area of the site:

- PA ref. 21546 (ABP-311760) – Permission granted for Clonymeath Solar Farm on land to the north and east of the subject substation. Development to comprise solar arrays on ground mounted steel frames, with a maximum overall height of 3m, over an area of 91.9ha and ancillary equipment including up to 30 number medium voltage power stations, one number module Battery Energy Storage Compound (comprising up to 5 no. battery containers). Associated development works include internal solar PV farm underground electrical cabling and ducting, two no. temporary construction compounds, security fencing, CCTV camera stands, replacement of existing entrance with new gated site entrance via the L2210 local road, new internal access tracks and upgrading and installation of span bridge structures, site drainage, and landscaping.
- Part 8 – Local authority development under P804009 comprising construction of wastewater treatment works and pumping station to serve Summerhill (2004).
- PA ref. 21985 (ABP-312723) – Permission granted for Derryclare Solar Farm. This comprises a development on three parcels of land, one to the northwest of the proposed substation, one to the east of it (and east of Clonymeath Solar Farm) and one on the eastern side of the L2210. The development site area is 108.68ha and includes solar panels mounted on steel support structures, associated cabling and ducting, 27 no. MV power stations, three no. client substations, three no. temporary construction compounds, access tracks, boundary security fencing and security gates, CCTV, landscaping and ancillary works.

4.2. In the wider area of the site are the following permitted developments:

- PA ref. 21/2214 (ABP-314058) – Situated c.4km to the east of the development site, permission granted by the Board for Woodtown Solar Farm on a site of 206ha.

- ABP-317498 – Culmullin 220kV substation, Section 182A application for a 220kV substation on land c.5km to the east of the development site. Lodged with the Board, not determined. Development is situated within the boundary of ABP-314058 above.
- PA ref. RA170766 - Situated c.3.5km to the southeast of the development site, to the south of the R156, permission granted by the PA for Knockstown Solar Farm on a site of 23.6ha (likely expired).

4.3. Notably, each of the above developments falls within the same Boyne_SC_060 sub catchment.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. EU, National and Regional Policy

5.2. EU, national and regional policy documents are relevant in respect of the proposed development and include:

- EU Directive 2009/28/EC and Directive 2018/2001/EU (Renewable Energy).
- National Planning Framework, Project Ireland 2040.
- Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2015), as amended.
- National Mitigation Plan, 2017.
- National Adaption Framework, 2018.
- Climate Action Plan, 2024.
- National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023-2030.
- Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031.

5.3. The legislation and policy documents referred to essentially promote, and set targets for, transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society and to support the development of associated infrastructure, including the development of the electricity transmission system, to support this transition (e.g., to accommodate more diverse flows arising from renewables), subject to environmental safeguards. The NBAP sets out objectives and targets for the protection and conservation of biodiversity in the State.

5.4. Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

- 5.5. The application site is situated within the administrative area of Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCDP). It lies outside of any settlement boundary and falls under the 'RA – Rural Area' designation. The objective of the zoning is *'To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and rural-related enterprise, biodiversity, the rural landscape and the built and cultural heritage'*. Sustainable energy installations and utility structures are deemed permitted uses within the zone.
- 5.6. Chapter 6 of the Meath CDP contains strategies and policies in respect of Infrastructure in the County. In section 6.1 it recognises the challenge of keeping pace with infrastructural demand for a growing county, whilst safeguarding public health and protecting environmental resources. In Section 6.15.3 (Renewable Energy), the Plan refers to the national policy context which requires a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and to the potential for solar renewable energy in the county (amongst others). In section 6.15.3.1 Solar Energy, the Plan states that large scale solar farms have been positively considered on suitable sites within the County in the recent past. Policies of the Plan regarding renewable energy are set out in INF POL 34 to INF POL 45 and in objectives INF OBJ 39 to INF OBJ 49. The policies and objectives support sustainable energy sources and renewable energy development, including solar, where development does not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment, including water quality, landscape, biodiversity, natural and built heritage, residential or local amenities.
- 5.7. Specific policies in relation to Energy Networks Infrastructure are set out in policies INF POL 46 to 53 and in objectives INF OBJ 50. These support enhanced electricity supplies, and associated networks, to serve the needs of the County and to facilitate integration of renewable energy proposals to the transmission grid, whilst ensuring least environmental impact.
- 5.8. Chapter 11 of the Plan contains Development Management Guidelines and Standards. In section 11.2.4, Energy Networks, the plan states that in the assessment of individual proposals, the Council will take the criteria outlined in section 11.8.1, Energy Development, into account. Policy DM POL 27, in section 11.8.1, encourages renewable energy proposals which contribute positively to reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint. DM OBJ 76 sets out criteria for the assessment of individual energy development proposals and these include

environmental and social impacts, traffic impacts including the effects of haul route, landscape effects, connection to the national grid, protection of natural heritage, proximity to structures of cultural heritage and cumulative impact assessment.

5.9. Policies in respect of cultural and natural heritage and landscape are set out in Chapter 8. These afford protection to features of archaeological interest, the Tara Complex (included on the World Heritage Site, Tentative List), the protection of architectural heritage (including Protected Structures), designed landscapes and gardens, natural heritage (including national and European sites) and the landscape. Policies of the Plan protect and enhance the quality, character and distinctiveness of the landscapes in the county with reference to the Landscape Character Assessment, included in Appendix 5 of the Plan.

5.10. **Natural Heritage Designations**

5.11. The application site is removed from sites of natural heritage interest. Nearest sites are:

- Rathmolyon Esker pNHA (site code 000557), c.4.8km to the west of the development site. Not hydrologically connected to the development site or within its zone of influence (e.g. by way of noise, disturbance).
- Royal Canal pNHA (site code 002103), c.6.7km to the south of the development site. Not hydrologically connected to the development site or within its zone of influence.
- Trim Wetlands pNHA (site code 001357), c.7.1km to the northwest of the site. Wetland complex within the River Boyne floodplain, c.13.1km downstream of the development site.
- Rye Water Valley/Cartron pNHA (site code 001398), c.15km to the southeast of the site. Not hydrologically connected to the development site or within its zone of influence.

5.12. The nearest European sites are:

- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA and SAC (site codes 004232 and 002299), c.12.5km downstream of the substation site, to the northwest of it.

- Rye Water Valley/Carlton SAC (site code 001398), c.15km to the southeast of the site. Not hydrologically connected to the development site or within its zone of influence.

5.13. EIA Screening

- 5.13.1. The applicant's Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report considers the requirement for EIA against the legislative basis set out in section 172 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations in respect of sub-threshold development.
- 5.13.2. The assessment considers that the proposed substation does not fall within any Class of Schedule 5, including the following classes:
- Class 3(a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water not included in Part 1 of this Schedule with a heat output of 300 megawatts or more, and
 - Class 3(b) Industrial installations for carrying gas, steam and hot water with 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.
- 5.13.3. The assessment also refers to Class 15, as any sub threshold project in Schedule 5 Part 2 which would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.
- 5.13.4. The assessment, on page 16 states that the development is not sub-threshold because it is not deemed to be a development which is relevant to any class as set out in Schedule 5, Part 2. Notwithstanding this, the applicant provides an assessment of the development against the criteria set out in Schedule 7 and provides the information specified in Schedule 7A (section 3.6). This assessment includes an evaluation of likely cumulative effects with other development in the area of the site.
- 5.13.5. In section 4³, the report concludes that taking into account the scale, location and nature of the project along with the types and characteristics of potential effects on

³ NB In section 4 the EIA Screening Report states that there will be no overhead cables as part of the proposed development, which is incorrect.

the factors specified for EIA, it can be concluded that due to the design of the project and provided all mitigation measures are properly implemented, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.

Assessment

5.13.6. Part 1 and Part 2 of Schedule 5 to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, set out classes of development for which EIA is mandatory, including:

- Class 20, Part 1 of Schedule 5, which requires EIA for the construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometres.
- Class 3(b), Part 2, Schedule 5, which requires EIA for industrial installations for the transmission of electrical energy by overhead cables, not included in Part 1, where the voltage would be 200kV or more.

5.13.7. The proposed development operates at a voltage of 110kV and includes a short length of OHL with the installation of c.171m of new 110kV line (including replacement of existing c.60m 110kV OHL). This proposed substation is well below the thresholds set out in Class 20, Part 1 (length and voltage) and below the threshold set out in Class 3(b), Part 2 (voltage). I note that the applicant proposes no private road or removal of hedgerows and the provisions of Part 2, Class 1(a) and Class 10(dd) do not apply.

5.13.8. I consider therefore that the development comprises a sub-threshold development under Class 20, Part 1 and Class 3(b), Part 2, for which a preliminary examination is required. Appended to this report are the relevant EIA screening forms. In this instance they include, EIA Pre-Screening, and as Schedule 7A information is submitted, an EIA Screening Determination.

5.13.9. Having regard to the modest scale and type of development, the lack of environmental sensitivity of the area in which it is situated and the absence of significant residues/emissions or use of natural resources it is concluded, that subject to the implementation of standard best practice construction measures, there is no potential for significant environmental effects and Environmental Impact Assessment is not warranted.

6.0 Planning Assessment

6.1. Having regard to the planning application made to the Board, the submissions by the PA and prescribed bodies and my inspection of the subject site, I consider the key issues to be addressed in the planning assessment are:

- Principle.
- Design and layout.
- Traffic and Transport.
- Ecological impact assessment.
- Impacts on the water environment and flood risk.
- Noise.
- Archaeology.
- Landscape and visual effects.
- Development contributions.
- Conditions of the permission.
- Other matters.

Principle

- 6.2. EU, national, regional, and local planning policies support the transition to a low carbon society, the use of renewable sources and their integration into the transmission system. The development site lies on land zoned RA. The policy objective for the zoning is *'To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and rural-related enterprise, biodiversity, the rural landscape and the built and cultural heritage'*. Acceptable uses include sustainable energy installations and utility structures.
- 6.3. The proposed development comes forward to facilitate the connection of the permitted Clonmeath Solar Farm, PA ref. 21546 (ABP-311760-23), to the transmission system via the Mullingar-Corduff 110kV OHL. The development, is therefore, in principle consistent with the policy context which supports renewable energy development and development of the transmission system to accommodate renewable energy, and the zoning of the site which permits sustainable energy

installations and utility structures. Environmental safeguards, associated with the zoning objective, are considered below.

Design and Layout

- 6.4. Design and layout of the proposed substation is set out in the applicant's schedule of drawings. The substation is situated on improved agricultural grassland, to the south and west of the permitted solar farm. The substation is offset from the watercourses to the west by at least 10m and is c.70m to the north of the existing 110kV OHL, with the exact location of the substation influenced by archaeological and flood related parameters (see below).

In their submission on the proposed development, the PA raise the following issues in respect of design and layout, which I consider here. Visual impacts and cumulative effects are considered later in this report.

Node in the network/decommissioning.

- 6.5. Contrary to the PA report, and as stated by the applicant, the substation will form a new node in the transmission network, with the existing power circuit diverting into the substation and out again. The substation will be transferred to, owned and operated by EirGrid, the Transmission System Operator. The sub-station will not be decommissioned, and no operational term is sought. Any conditions in respect of decommissioning are, therefore, not relevant.

Proposed substation and Derryclare Solar Farm.

- 6.6. Derryclare Solar Farm adjoins the Clonmeath Solar Farm site to the east and west. As stated by the applicant, an application has been made to the board for a 220kV substation at Culmullin (ABP-317498). In the application documents for ABP-317498 it is stated that proposed the substation will serve the Derryclare Solar Farm. Any future connections into the proposed Clonmeath sub-station would be a matter for EirGrid, as part of their management of the wider transmission infrastructure, and subject to any necessary consents.

Options for building structure.

- 6.7. The applicant has proposed two options for the IPP building design, to accommodate potential design variations within the planning consent. The proposed prefabricated unit has a maximum height of c.4.6m and a smaller footprint than the traditional build

structure (ridge height c.6.5m), see Drawing No. 409-00, Sheets 1 and 2. The development site is substantially removed from the public road network and sensitive receptors and is well screened by a mix of topography and existing vegetation. The two design options for the IPP building, whilst different, will not introduce substantially different visual effects outside of the site or in the public domain. I am satisfied therefore that this matter can be addressed in advance of commencement, by condition of permission, should the Board decide to grant permission.

Condition in respect of public lighting.

- 6.8. As indicated in the applicant's response to the PA's submission, no public lighting is proposed for the development. This would obviate the need for a public lighting condition. (Lighting is also discussed under Ecological Impact Assessment below).

Minor differences between NIS and Planning report (length of OHL to be removed/installed).

- 6.9. The NIS and project description refer to slightly different lengths of OHL to be removed and installed i.e. 53m v 60m to be removed and 172m v 180m to be installed. The differences referred to are not substantial and will have no impact on the conclusions in respect of the environmental or ecological effects of the development. Notwithstanding this, in response to the issue, the applicant refers the Board to the 1:500 plan drawings of the development and re-iterates for clarity the specifications for the development set out in the public notices, c.60m of 110kV line to be removed and c.171.6m to be installed. I have measured the 1:500 Site Layout Detail drawing (Drawing no. 403-01) and estimate the length of OHL to be removed is c.60m (based on the average length of OHL to be removed) and c.170m to be installed (based on average length of OHL to be installed). I would also acknowledge the applicant's point that the DAU in their observations, have accepted the conclusions of the NIS and not raised any issues in respect of it.

External finishes.

- 6.10. In response to the PA's submission, the applicant states that there is limited scope to condition materials and finishes, as all the items must meet EirGrid's functional specifications. I note that EirGrid have a Functional Specification document, which specifies the finish to certain equipment. Notwithstanding this, there is no reason

that service buildings and fencing cannot have regard to the rural location of the development. This matter could be addressed by condition.

CCTV.

- 6.11. The Site Layout Detail (Drawing no. 403-01) indicates CCTV poles around the battery compound only (four no.). Height of the poles is shown in Drawing Fence and CCTV Details (Drawing no. 503-02) and is 4.09m. The drawing also shows that the CCTV cameras will face inward only and have a green colour finish. In principle, I am satisfied that CCTV poles are required for security and will not adversely impact on residential properties if orientated correctly (and given the distance to nearest properties). Details can be agreed to the satisfaction of the planning authority by condition.

Traffic and Transport

- 6.12. The applicant proposes access to the substation site from the L2210, as permitted for Clonmeath Solar Farm under ABP-311760. This entails closure of the existing agricultural access and creation of a new access c.30m to the north of this, with provision of 90m sightlines in each direction and reinstatement of the existing hedgerow behind the sightline. The subject development includes proposals to extend the permitted internal access track to substation compound/EirGrid building, the IPP building and to the permitted battery storage area. In principle the arrangements are acceptable and provide for the use of existing permitted infrastructure to access the site, with modest extension.
- 6.13. In their submission, the PA refers to the absence parking proposals for operational traffic and TII refer to compliance with DoECLG's Spatial Planning and National Road Guidelines. I address these issues below.

Parking proposals.

- 6.14. The applicant states, in response, that whilst individual parking spaces are not marked for operational traffic, Substation Compound Layout Drawing 405 shows aprons within the IPP compound (northern end) and EirGrid substation compound (northern side) both of which can accommodate vehicles in parking bays (4 no. and 8 no. respectively).

- 6.15. It is evident from the project documentation that operational traffic will be very small, for example, c1-2 cars/month. The aprons within the IPP and EirGrid compounds would be more than adequate to accommodate this volume of traffic. Formal demarcation of spaces could be addressed by condition.

Compliance with the DoECLG's Spatial Planning and National Road Guidelines.

- 6.16. The government's guidelines 'Spatial Planning and National Roads' DHLGH, 2012, essentially provide protection for the safety and capacity of the national road network, outside of the 50/60kph speed limit zone for urban areas.
- 6.17. Access to the proposed development site is from the minor public road to the east of the site, L2210, with a speed limit of 80kph. This joins the R156 Regional Road c.500m to the southwest of the site, east of Summerhill, and to the R154, c.5.5km to the northeast. The road is identified in the Meath CDP as a Local Primary Road having a regionally or locally important function.
- 6.18. The applicant's Traffic Transport and Access Report (TTAR) refers to policies of the rural development policies of Meath CDP which protect public safety and the carrying capacity of non-national roads of regional or local importance. The TTAR presents data on baseline traffic flows, based on survey work carried out in 2021 (during Covid) and further survey work in 2023 for the L2210. Appendix 3 identifies survey locations, with the L2210, R156 and R158, identified as the haul route for traffic. Figure 4 indicates the baseline hourly traffic on the L2210 on a normal weekday, with a morning peak of c.155 PCU/hour and an evening peak of c.202 PCU/hour. Traffic volumes on the R156 are updated from MCC survey (May 2023) and indicate a morning peak of c.380 PCU/hour and an evening peak of c.545 PCU/hour (Figure 7).
- 6.19. Operational traffic is considered to have no effect on the public road network, given the very modest level of traffic anticipated (one visit/month by service engineer and occasional maintenance work).
- 6.20. Predicted trip generation for the operational phase, based on traffic growth projections and estimated construction traffic, is shown in Appendix 2. Trip generation included for the proposed substation and submitted solar farm, with the proposed substation, main construction compound, grid connection and shared access constructed first, over a period of 50 weeks. Follow on construction of the

solar arrays, MV power stations, fencing, site internal track and cabling and batter compound will take place between weeks 48 (overlap) and 75 weeks. Effects on the local road network summarised in Table 5, with the construction phase estimated to add on a temporary basis, during peak construction periods, an additional 101 PCU/day and 46 PCU/hour during the evening peak traffic period. This peak period would coincide with week 53 to 60 when solar panels are being delivered to and assembled on site.

- 6.21. Construction traffic would lead to a c.3% temporary average increase in traffic on the L2210 and +1.1% on the R156. Maximum effects are greater, with greatest increase of +22.5% and +7.9% for the am peak on the L2210 and R156 respectively. As the average increase in temporary additional traffic does not exceed the 5% of the traffic flow on adjoining road or junctions, in accordance with the NRA Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines, the impact would not be considered significant or warrant a traffic and transport assessment (the assessment is carried out therefore on an advisory basis). It is stated that the TTAR assumes a worst-case scenario where peak hourly deliveries to site coincide with peak travel times. Overall, the TTAR concludes that the temporary increase in traffic, and over a short section of the L2210 and R156, can be safely accommodated within the existing road network, with a temporary adverse but not significant effect of the development.
- 6.22. Delivery route to the site is identified in Map 1, Appendix 3 of the TTAR. Deliveries are assumed to commence at Dublin Port and use the M50, M4, R158, R156 and L2210. Autotrack analysis for the R158/R156 onward to the development site is included in the application drawings, for the site entrance and for the 1.1km of the internal access track to the substation site (Drawing 306, 304 and 302 respectively). Delivery of one abnormal load for the transport of the substation transformer to the site will be by way of special delivery for abnormal loads, to be agreed in advance with MCC.
- 6.23. The TTAR assesses the potential for cumulative effects with other transmission infrastructure or solar farm development in the area of the site (Table 8). This refers to Culmullin 220kV substation (proposed), Knockstown Solar Farm (permitted), Derryclare Solar Farm (permitted) and Woodtown Solar Farm (proposed). It also refers to Cloneymeath 110kV substation as a pre-application consultation with the Board (i.e. the subject development), which I assume is in error.

6.24. Of these developments, construction of Derryclare Solar Farm will require access from the L2210 and R156. However, it is stated that construction of the solar farm is not anticipated to be simultaneous with the subject development, with no additional traffic impact. If there is an overlap, it is stated that Derryclare Solar Farm does not include a substation or significant grid infrastructure and accordingly will have a much shorter duration, with any potential for cumulative effects to be minor. Other developments (Table 8) are sufficiently distant and do not share access routes.

Assessment.

6.25. The TTAR assesses the likely effect of the development on the public roads in the immediate area of the site. This approach is not unreasonable and at greater distances, traffic generated will be absorbed into the wider road network. Traffic volumes on the L2210 and the R156, existing and predicted, are set out in the TTAR (summarised above) and predicted average flows in the context of these, is relatively modest and short term.

6.26. Peak flows are more substantial, especially if there is overlap between phases of the development, as stated in the TTAR, and if the discrete construction phases of the project overlap (as indicated in Appendix 2). Notwithstanding this, TTAR provides a conservative approach where peak flows coincide with evening peak periods, which is unlikely to be the case, and the increase in traffic will be for a relatively short period and affect a short length of the L2210 and R156.

6.27. The applicant proposes standard best practice mitigation measures, to be included in a traffic management plan, with a traffic management coordinator, travel plan for construction workers, temporary traffic signs, wheel washing facilities and sweeping/cleaning of local roads and reinstatement of roads and detailed site traffic management plan. Subject to implementation of these measures, I am satisfied that the proposed development will not have an adverse effect on the carrying capacity, safety or function of the local road (including its locally or regionally important function), regional road or the national road network and would comply with the DoECLG's Spatial Planning and National Road Guidelines.

6.28. The TTAR refers to the potential for cumulative effects with the part of Derryclare Solar Farm that will be constructed from an access off the L2210, should construction occur at a similar time to the subject development (and associated solar

farm). Whilst this is not anticipated, it is a matter which could be addressed by condition to ensure that the potential for short term cumulative effects is identified in advance of construction and addressed in the traffic management plan (e.g. short-term site-specific traffic management measures). The potential for significant cumulative effects with other solar farms in the wider area is not likely given the use of alternative roads to provide construction access to these sites and the likely dissipation effects of traffic in the wider road network.

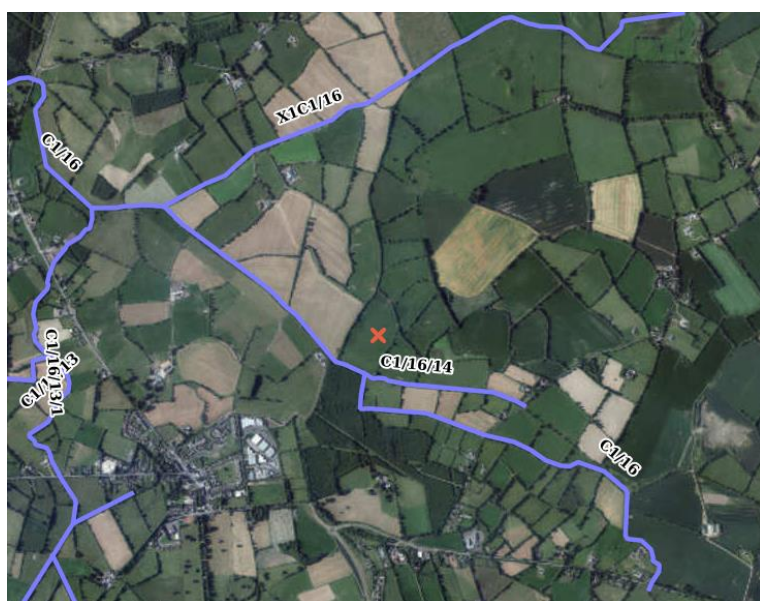
6.29. Ecological Impact Assessment

6.30. In their observations, the PA invite the Board to consider whether further studies are necessary to consider the impact of the proposed development on specific mammals e.g. bats and recommend a condition to address the risk of invasive species. The DAU accept the conclusions of the EIAR and NIS and recommend a condition requiring the CEMP to be submitted to the PA for written approval and to incorporate all mitigation measures set out in the EIAR and NIS.

6.31. The applicant's Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) considers potential effects on biodiversity of the proposed substation and permitted solar farm. Desk survey had regard to the ecology of the surrounding area and records of protected species within 2km of the development site. Field survey work was carried out having regard best practice guidelines. Survey work was carried out in January 2021 and September 2023 (of part of the site) and this seasonal limitation was acknowledged in the Report (habitat and vegetation survey). However, given the use of the development site, primarily improved agricultural grassland, semi-improved wet grassland, tillage and hedgerows, it was considered that the highly managed habitats were not likely to support species of conservation interest that are sensitive to solar farm development or therefore that the constraint was significant. Habitats occurring on the subject site and associated solar farm are shown in Figure 2, EclA. The proposed sub-station is situated entirely within improved agricultural grassland. Watercourses within the solar farm site and alongside the substation site are described in the EclA (Figure 2, EclA and Figure 1-2, FRA). It is noted that the watercourses on site differ from mapped watercourses. They include:

- The Cloneymeath River lies immediately south of the substation site. This is also referred to as the Knightsbrook River, and OPW channel C1/16.

- Springvalley Stream, which joins Cloneymeath River to the south of the substation site. The permitted access route follows the course of Springfield Stream c.260m west of the entrance from the public road, and for c.185m. The stream runs adjacent to the coniferous plantation. (Not shown in OPW Drainage map below).
- Arterial drainage channel C1/16/14, also to the south of the site, which joins the Cloneymeath River, again to the south of the site.
- An unnamed land drain adjacent to the western site boundary.
- The Dangan River, also referred to as the Ballynamona River, and OPW channel X1C1/16, to the north of the substation site.



Source: OPW Drainage Map.

6.32. The proposed substation site drains to Cloneymeath River which, via intermediate watercourses, discharges into the River Boyne, downstream of Trim. The substation site, the consented solar farm and associated watercourses are all within the Boyne_SC_060 WFD sub-catchment and also drain to the River Boyne. WFD status for the period 2016-2021 for the Knightsbrook_010 waterbody (Cloneymeath River) upstream and downstream of the solar farm and substation site is Poor, with the river At Risk of not meeting water quality objectives by 2027 (Good status). It is stated in the EclA that pressures on the waterbody are agriculture (diffuse and point source pollution), urban runoff and industry. I note that the EPAs sub-catchment report also indicates hydromorphology as a significant pressure (channelisation). The

Knightsbrook River, of which Cloneymeath River is a tributary, is known to support Atlantic salmon, brown trout and lamprey.

- 6.33. No rare, threatened or protected plant species were identified in field survey or desk survey within the site or surrounding area.
- 6.34. Badger, brown rat, fox, grey squirrel, Irish hare and badger have been recorded in the tetrad in which the site is located. Field survey found signs of fox, rabbit, rat and Irish hare. Suitable habitat was identified for other common mammals, Irish stoat, hedgehog, wood mouse, pygmy shrew and common and soprano pipistrelle and the EclA states that it is likely that these occur on the site, at least on occasion. Otter has been recorded downstream of the site (c.2.6km) and the EclA acknowledges that it is possible that they may forage along Cloneymeath River and other water courses in the site, despite current poor water quality. Bird species occurring in the tetrad in which the site is situated are indicated in Table 2 and includes two red list species Grey Wagtail and Meadow pipit. The EclA states that there is potential for any of the species to forage though not necessarily breed in the site. Further, it is considered that the bird fauna of the site is primarily composed of species common to agricultural landscapes, with no evidence that the site is on a significant flight path or is a significant stepping stone. Habitat suitability for reptiles and amphibians is marginal and given the intensively managed nature of the site, and presence of invertebrates of conservation interest is considered to be unlikely.
- 6.35. Having regard to the foregoing, habitats, watercourses and flora are evaluated to be of Low Local Importance/Value for nature conservation. Mammal, bird, amphibian, and invertebrate faunas are composed of common species of intensive agricultural landscapes. Species of conservation interest that may be present are Irish hare and frog.
- 6.36. Effects of the proposed development, for different phases are assessed as:
- Do nothing – Continuation of agricultural practices and associated effects.
 - Construction – Loss of mainly intensively farmed agricultural land of little conservation importance, very small amount of hedgerow loss. Potential for disturbance to mammals and birds (noise etc.), with temporary and not significant effects on Low Local Importance of fauna on the site. Moderate risk of increased siltation and pollution of watercourses (e.g. hydrocarbons) with adverse effects

on downstream habitats and species, including Knightsbrook River which supports protected species (Atlantic salmon, brown trout and river lamprey) and Trim pNHA c.13km downstream of the proposed substation. In the absence of mitigation, the substation and solar farm development are predicted to have a significant negative effect at the local scale on aquatic ecology.

- Operation – Change of habitat with introduction of solar farm, with negative impacts on semi-natural grasslands, to be offset to some extent by small positive impacts on improved grassland biodiversity (depending on how grasslands are managed). In the absence of mitigation, impact of habitat change on biodiversity is predicted to be not significant. Limited disturbance during operation, with fauna likely to become accustomed to any new regime, with no significant effects. No potential for significant barrier effects with security fencing around solar farm (with fencing to provide a 150mm clearance above ground for passage of most mammals, except deer). Limited research but no evidence of significant collision risk to birds from solar farms.
- Cumulative effects – Potential for cumulative effects on water quality with other consented and proposed projects in the area of the site, including solar farms at Knockstown, Derryclare, Woodtown, Culmullin 220kV substation, infilling and materials reclamation adjacent to closed Basketstown Landfill, 100m north of the Clonmeath solar farm, active sand and gravel quarry c.710m to the north of Clonmeath solar farm, bio-renewable energy facility at Windtown, 1.3km NW of the solar farm, smaller building projects and agricultural activity in the catchment). No potential for other cumulative effects, given the location of the development in a landscape dominated by intensive agriculture (lack of sensitivity of terrestrial habitats) and narrow zone of influence of the development.

6.37. Mitigation and enhancement measures are set out in section 5 of the EclA. Best practice measures, including adherence to Inland Fisheries Ireland guidelines on the protection of fisheries during construction work, are proposed to prevent the pollution or increased sedimentation of watercourses in the vicinity of the site. Measures will be included in a Construction Environmental Management Plan and a draft of this proposed live document is submitted with the application documents. With the implementation of mitigation measures, no significant effects on water quality are predicted.

6.38. Enhancement measures relate largely to the solar farm site and include:

- Management of semi-natural grassland for increased biodiversity, to the benefit of invertebrates, birds, small mammals and flora e.g. with reseeded with appropriate conservation seed mixes and appropriate mowing regimes. In total 93.3ha of species rich grassland will be created to provide a large increase in the local area of semi-natural habitat, with significant positive effect at a local scale.
- Hedgerow reinstatement, where hedgerows are cleared to provide access and sightlines and management of new and existing hedgerows in line with best practice.
- Management of drains, that do not fall under OPW remit, with cleaning on an as needed basis to prevent unnecessary removal of wetland habitat.

6.39. With the implementation of mitigation measures, the EcIA predicts no significant effects on biodiversity and significant, positive local scale effects for habitats, flora, mammals, birds and other fauna.

Lighting

6.40. Submitted with the application is a Technical Note on Substation Lighting. The purpose of the Note is to outline how lighting of the substation will be managed to minimise ecological impacts. EirGrid/ESB requires illumination to provide safe pedestrian travel anywhere in the substation. The proposed substation will not be manned, and lighting will only be required on an *ad hoc* basis and at nighttime in the case of emergency only. Lighting would therefore be controlled by a two-way switch at the substation entrance and only switched on as required i.e. the lighting for the EirGrid/ESB and IPP compounds would be switched on manually by an operator and only used in extended maintenance or fault conditions. There will also be a sensor light at the control building doors which would light up temporarily for c.2 minutes if the sub-station was being used during the nighttime. The Technical Note states that the effects on ecology, including badger and bat species, would be negligible as there would be no requirement to have permanent lighting at the substation and any works at the site would occur during daylight hours, except for emergency works. Lighting design, as set out in the Preliminary Lighting Design Report, demonstrates a very low level of lighting impact on areas outside the compound (and only then on the very limited occasion of emergency maintenance works).

6.41. Assessment

- 6.42. The proposed substation, and permitted solar farm, are situated within an agricultural setting, with the system of agriculture resulting in terrestrial and aquatic habitats generally of low conservation value. Land take, for the solar farm, and substations is primarily from intensively managed agricultural fields, with hedgerows and watercourses i.e. commuting corridors, left intact or where minor hedgerow loss occurs (permitted solar farm), with replacement planting. Field survey identified limited use of the site by mammals i.e. from a combination of direct observations, signs of the species and habitat present that would be able to support species. Notably field survey includes assessment in September, within the appropriate period for a preliminary ecological assessment, (habitat and vegetation surveys) and bat activity.
- 6.43. Having regard to the foregoing, inspection of the application site, its established use as managed agricultural land, the resultant low potential of the site to provide a suitable habitat for mammals, and the design and layout of the development, which is removed from existing site boundaries (ecological corridors), I am satisfied that there is no requirement for further mammal surveys. Further, I am satisfied that with the detailed implementation of the proposed biodiversity enhancement measures in the associated solar farm, there will be a net gain for biodiversity in the immediate area of the site. If the Board are minded to grant permission, I would recommend a condition requiring application of the biodiversity enhancement measures to be extended to the solar farm site, so far as is practical (i.e. outside of the substation compound). With regard to invasive species, the proposed CEMP includes an invasive species management plan. Any permission can require that this be agreed with the PA in advance of construction. Standard conditions can also require that the CEMP is agreed with the PA in advance of construction and to include all mitigation measures set out in the project documentation.
- 6.44. I am mindful that EirGrid places certain requirements on the applicant to light the substation site, and that the applicant has provided a scheme of lighting to meet this requirement. Further, I acknowledge the applicant's intention that the substation will be mostly unmanned and that works will be carried out during the daytime, with nighttime illumination largely restricted to emergencies. I also note that the lux lighting proposed at the perimeter of the site is very low level (similar to twilight).

Having regard to these factors, I am satisfied that the development will not adversely impact on nocturnal species or bats because of the subject development.

6.45. Impacts on the water environment and flood risk

6.46. No concerns are raised by the PA in respect of the water environment or flood risk, but it is recommended that if permission is granted that surface water is addressed to the satisfaction of the PA (e.g. provision of soakaways, on site infiltration, compliance with drainage standards). The PA also advise that OPWs comments in relation to drainage channels should inform the Board's conditions (maintenance of 10m drainage strip alongside channel to enable vehicular access) and invite the Board to consider any recommendations made by Irish Water. There are no submissions on file from Irish Water or the OPW.

6.47. Potential effects on the water environment are considered in the applicant's Geology and Hydrogeology Assessment and flood risk in the applicant's Stage 3 Flood Risk Assessment.

Geology and Hydrogeology

6.48. Soils on the substation site comprise poorly drained soils and limestone derived subsoils. The limestone bedrock is a Locally Important and generally Productive in Local Zones, of Moderate vulnerability (Trim Groundwater Body, IE_EA_G_002, Good status, At Risk of not meeting WFD objectives). There are no karst features on or in the area of the site (>1km). There are no groundwater wells on the substation site or within 200m of it. Irish Water have a water supply zone over 1km to the southwest of the site and there are other domestic use/public supply boreholes within 1km. Surface water features are described above.

6.49. Potential impacts of the substation are:

- Construction – Localised disturbance of soil/subsoil/bedrock with risk of increased erosion of soils, increase in surface water runoff (with the removal of vegetation) and potential contamination of surface water (e.g. siltation, cement, hydrocarbons, sanitary waste) and ground. Prior to mitigation effects are predicted to be minor adverse.

- Operation – The potential for contamination of soils and groundwater from infrequent use of machinery (hydrocarbons, accidental spills etc), with negligible minor adverse effects.
- Cumulative – The Report refers to the potential overlap of construction of the subject development and Clonmeath Solar Farm, having a shared entrance, access route and construction compound. However, no other cumulative effects are predicted as other solar farms/substations permitted in the area of the site are not anticipated to be constructed concurrently.

6.50. In order to mitigate potential effects, the applicant proposes standard good construction practices, drainage regime to include separate clean water and silt laden water, use of attenuation and settlement systems, silt fencing and buffer zones to water course, designated refuelling locations removed from surface water features. Mitigation measures are included in the CEMP. During operation, vehicles will be regularly checked for damage/leaks, fuel will be stored in bunded areas. Rainwater harvesting will be used for toilet flushing and a foul water holding tank emptied as required. Potable water will be supplied by contractor.

6.51. With mitigation, no significant residual effects are predicted. The report recommends that local surface water features and Clonmeath River are monitored pre and during construction by twice daily visual inspections (photographic log and daily records) with surface water monitoring for suspended solids on a weekly basis (details to be developed in consultation with the relevant authorities prior to commencement).

6.52. Assessment

6.53. Having regard to the modest footprint of the development, setback from adjoining watercourses, proposed best practice mitigation measures, which are capable of offsetting effects on soils and water quality, I am generally satisfied that no significant adverse effects on soils of the water environment will arise.

6.54. The construction compound includes a 'concrete pit'. It is not clear what this will be used for. The application documentation indicates that there will be no washing out of any plant used in concrete transport, with only chute cleaning permitted with little water use. If the Board are minded to grant permission, I would recommend that a condition specifically excludes washing out of vehicles used to transport concrete. In

addition, I would recommend a that a programme of water quality monitoring, as proposed by the applicant, be agreed in advance with the PA as proposed in the application documents.

- 6.55. Concurrent construction activity of the proposed substation and permitted solar farm, and other development in the same sub-catchment, has the potential for cumulative effects on soils and the water environment. However, permission for the solar farm and other development that has been or will be granted, is predicated on the absence of significant effects on soils, surface and groundwater, in particular, in view of the competent authorities' requirements under the WFD. These typically include standard best practice construction measures which have been demonstrated to be effective in offsetting adverse effects. In this context, I am satisfied that there is no potential for significant adverse effects on soils or the water environment or for any deterioration in water quality (as required under the WFD).

Flood Risk

- 6.56. The applicant's Stage 3 Flood Risk Assessment considers flood risk for the proposed substation and permitted solar farm (ABP-311760). Water courses in the vicinity of the site are described above under Ecological Impact Assessment. The FRA provides a quantitative appraisal of potential flood risk in relation to the proposed development (substation and solar farm). It assesses the proposed development against the Mid-Range Future Scenario (MRFS) to take account the potential effects of climate change.
- 6.57. There are no recorded past flood events on the substation site, however, Cloneymeath River has burst its bank, with water flowing onto the public road to the east of the site (Figure 3-1). The OPWs Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PRFA), indicates the potential for fluvial flooding on the southern part of the site for a 1 in 100-year flood event (Figure 3-2). The limitations associated with the predictive modelling exercises assume a channel capacity, an absence of flood defences and other drainage improvements and channel structures (e.g. weirs, bridges) and local errors in terrain modelling. The FRA refers to the drainage works carried out by OPW in the area of the site, with the southern part of the site benefiting from the Boyne Arterial Drainage Scheme, with the river and its tributaries widened and deepened to improve their effectiveness at draining the catchment (Figure 3-6).

- 6.58. The updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment prepared for the Meath CDP, identifies the southern part of the substation site and part of the solar farm site located in Flood zone A, high probability of flooding (Figure 2-2). Similarly, the OPWs more detailed National Indicative Fluvial Mapping indicates the southern part of the substation site falling within predicted extent of 1 in 100 year and 1 in 1000-year fluvial flood events (current scenario) and with climate change (Mid-Range Future Scenario) (Figures 3-4 and 3-5).
- 6.59. To quantify the risk of fluvial flooding with the proposed development and permitted solar farm, the FRA provides a site-specific hydraulic assessment based on four watercourses identified in the vicinity of the site, their catchments (see Figure 4-1), estimated flows and the hydraulic modelling of the watercourses. NB, I note that the 'Cloneymeath catchment' includes Springvalley Stream (see Ecological Impact Assessment of this report). Predicted 1% AEP and 0.1% AEP, current scenario (Flood Zones A and B respectively) are shown in Figure 4-3, with portions of the southern part of the substation site at risk of fluvial flooding. Predicted 1% AEP and 0.1% AEP, MRFS are shown in Figure 4-4, again with portions of the southern part of the substation site at risk of fluvial flooding, but sensitive elements of the development located in Flood Zone C (not predicted to flood during a 1000-year event).
- 6.60. Both existing and future scenarios indicate that a section of the access road to the substation and solar farm will cross the floodplain (Figure 4-3). Two clear span bridges are proposed to provide access along this route across the OPW channel C1/16 Cloneymeath River and C1/16/14 watercourse (Figures 4-5 and 4-6). Modelling of the effect of the bridges on flooding indicate local effects for the new bridge of C1/16/14 (imperceptible impact 200m upstream/downstream of bridge) and imperceptible effects of the replacement bridge across Cloneymeath River (C1/16). It is stated that both crossings will be designed and approved through the section 50 application process.
- 6.61. In section 4.4 the applicant presents an analysis of a 50% blockage of crossing openings (new and replacement bridge) to determine residual flood risk for the 100-year MRFS flood event. Results of the exercise indicate a local increase in flood levels of 0.05m, with an imperceptible impact on flood levels 200m upstream/downstream (Figure 4-9 and 4-10).

6.62. Having regard to the foregoing, the FRA assessment provides a number of mitigation measures, including the following in respect of potential fluvial flooding:

- Location of infrastructure essential to electricity generation (substation and solar panels), outside of the predicted 1000-year flood event.
- 110kV substation located to ensure a minimum of 500mm freeboard to substation compound level above 1000-year flood zone.
- 10m buffer strip alongside water courses (OPW access).
- Access track to cross floodplain at existing ground level.
- Only deer fencing within floodplain.
- Use of SuDS to ensure runoff restricted to greenfield rates.
- Bridges to cater for the 100year MRFS flow with a freeboard of 300mm in accordance with OPW Section 50 hydraulic design standards.

6.63. Two new 110kV end masts are proposed within Flood zone A but these are water compatible and associated risk of flooding with the end masts is minimal.

6.64. Risk of pluvial flooding is stated to be low due to the natural topography of the site, historic drainage arrangements (channels) and proposed arrangements for the management of surface water onsite during construction and operation. No risk of groundwater flooding or coastal flooding is identified. No impacts are predicted because of the development elsewhere (e.g. with the solar farm increasing runoff volumes, peaks etc.) due to the treatment of access tracks (permeable, gravelled), maintenance of grassland under solar panels and controls to limit runoff to greenfield rates.

6.65. The FRA considers the potential for cumulative effects with permitted solar farms within 5km of the site (Figure 5-1, including Derryclare, Knockstown, Woodtown Solar Farms and the proposed Culmullin substation). Having regard to the location of the developments in Flood zone C and/or the FRAs carried out, and the absence of potential for any flood risk arising from these developments, the FRA concludes that there is no potential for cumulative impact on flood risk.

6.66. The FRA considers the proposed development against the criteria of the Justification Test and considers that criteria are satisfied, as the subject site is not covered by a local area plan (not zoned), the site has been subject to a site specific FRA, the development is predicted to have imperceptible impact on flood risk elsewhere,

measures are included to minimise the risk of flood risk and to manage residual risk, and the proposed development is compatible with wider planning objectives of the CDP.

6.67. Assessment

- 6.68. The Department's Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines identify electricity generating substations as essential infrastructure, highly vulnerable to flooding and requiring a justification test if it is to be located on land with a high or moderate probability of flooding.
- 6.69. The southern part of the appeal site, lying alongside Cloneymeath River is identified at risk of flooding, the permitted access road crosses the path of the predicted floodplain and a replacement bridge, and a new bridge are proposed across C1/16 and C1/16/14 respectively. The layout of the development is designed such that the sub-station is located at least 10m north of the predicted 1000-year flood even and at a FFL a minimum of 500mm above the predicted 1000-year flood event zone (proposed compound level is 76.9mOD, highest predicted 1 in 1000-year MRFS water level is 75.9m). Two new 110kV end masts are proposed within the flood zone but this is not unreasonable and by their open nature, would not significantly reduce the volume of the flood plain or restrict flows. As stated, the proposed access track will be at existing levels and will not reduce the flood plain area or restrict flows. Bridge infrastructure has the potential to restrict flows but has been modelled to have no significant effects beyond 200m, in any future scenario. The applicant has identified permitted solar farms around the site which lie within the same WFD sub-catchment. These applications/permissions have included FRA, or the site lies within flood zone C and any permissions granted have accepted that there is no flood risk associated with the developments. I am satisfied therefore, that there is no potential for significant cumulative flood risk with the subject development.
- 6.70. Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that the proposed development has been subject to an appropriate FRA and subject to implementation of proposed mitigation measures, will not be subject to inappropriate flooding or increase flood risk elsewhere, includes measures to minimise flood risk, manage residual risk and addresses these matters in a manner which is compatible with the achievement of wider planning objectives. The proposed development therefore complies with the

government's guidelines on Flood Risk Management and the Justification Test in particular.

6.71. Noise.

6.72. In their submission, the PA Invite the Board to consider whether the noise monitoring carried out in 2020 is sufficient. If permission is granted, it is recommended that the comments by Environment section, in relation to the solar farm development, are included.

6.73. The application documents include a Noise Report, October 2023. It is based on a noise survey carried out continuously between 10th to 16th December 2020 at N1 (Figure 1, Noise Report), situated to the east of the substation site along local road L2210. Nearest receptors H45 and H31 are at a similar distance (Figure 1). The survey was carried out during a period of low traffic flow due to Covid. L₉₀, L₁₀ and L_{eq} range from 30.0 to 40.4 dBA, 41.0 to 55.4 dBA and 42 to 54.4 dBA respectively. Noise sources are mainly road traffic (near and far) and to a lesser extent, domestic activity.

6.74. The Noise report refers to standard NRA and BS guidelines for construction noise (section 4.1), and EPA and WHO guidelines for operational noise (section 4.2), to prevent adverse effects and to the typical noise levels likely to arise from construction work (Table 5). It predicts likely noise at nearest receptors H45 and H31 for construction, 40.4 to 43.4 LA_{eq} dB 1hr (H45) and 39.1 to 42.1 LA_{eq} dB 1hr (H31), with noise levels well within construction noise criterion. Predicted operational noise levels are based on measurements taken from a similar substation, with predicted effects at H45 and H31 of 15.9 LA_{eq} dB 1hr and 15.3 LA_{eq} dB 1hr respectively, with noise levels well below lower guideline limits for day, evening and night given by the EPA (see section 4.2). The Noise report considers the potential for cumulative effects with the adjoining Derryclare solar farm and permitted Clonymeath Solar farm. It is stated that in the permitted Derryclare Solar Farm, the receptors H45 and H31 were distant from it and assessed not to have any cumulative impact. It is also stated in the noise report that the cumulative noise levels from the permitted Clonymeath and Derryclare solar farms will not be increased at H31 or H45 by the operation of the 110kV substation.

6.75. Assessment

- 6.76. The proposed substation is in a rural area. The noise monitoring location is situated on the L2210, and noise monitoring was carried out during Covid when background noise levels (e.g. traffic, human activity) would be typically lower than normal levels. This would provide a lower-than-normal noise environment for the impact assessment, with the potential for greater magnitude of effects over background levels. Notwithstanding this, H45 is set back from the public road and H31 is situated in a housing estate on the edge of Summerhill. The noise environment of these properties may therefore also be lower than that measured on the L2210. Within this context the use of the 2020 noise monitoring data is not unreasonable.
- 6.77. Predicted construction noise at nearest receptors H45 and H31 is well below standard noise limits for construction activity. Construction noise (e.g. from vehicles accessing the site and for construction of the entrance and access tracks) is also likely to arise for a small number of properties on the L2210 near the proposed site entrance, whilst works are proximate the dwellings are carried out. Similarly, should Derryclare Solar Farm (ABP-312723), be constructed in tandem, short term cumulative effects may also arise on the L2210 (increased noise environment). Standard construction noise limits should therefore apply to protect residential amenity.
- 6.78. For the operational phase, based on the measured noise arising at 150m from an existing 110kV substation, predicted noise at 150m (32dBA < quiet bedroom), is not likely to give rise to any adverse effects at H45 or H31, which are >650m from the substation site or to any other sensitive properties.
- 6.79. With regard to cumulative effects, it was accepted in the Board's assessment of the permitted Clonmeath Solar Farm (ABP-311760) that noise arising from the operation of the solar farm would be well within nighttime noise limits, where noise levels were predicted based on maximum output from the solar farm during summer daylight hours between 04:00 and 07:00, and that cumulative effects, of the solar array, battery storage containers and 110kV substation would be inaudible at all receptors and at a similar or lower level than the background noise levels recorded in low road traffic flow levels. The applicant's prediction of operational noise from the substation is consistent with this conclusion i.e. there is no potential for significant operational noise impacts at nearest sensitive receptors with the operation of the substation and solar farm.

- 6.80. Similarly, in its assessment of Derryclare Solar Farm (ABP-312723), the Board accepted that impacts of operational noise were not likely to be significant, with negligible or low impact at all receptors (with predicted effects below the nighttime noise guideline value of 40dB).
- 6.81. Given the low level of noise predicted to arise from the proposed substation and permitted solar farm, significant cumulative noise effects with all developments operating together, are not likely to arise.
- 6.82. **Archaeology.**
- 6.83. In submissions, the Department broadly agree with the findings of the CHIA and archaeological impact assessment and recommend conditions for any grant of permission. The PA recommend further information to address survey anomalies in the vicinity of ME043-007 (church and graveyard), blanket test trenching of the site, clarification of mitigation proposals in respect of CH23, 24 and 25, survey of Cloneymeath Bridge (CH34) and former farm pump (CH28) and a written, sketched and photographic record of townland boundaries (CH29-32), in case of damage during construction.
- 6.84. Assessment of likely effects on cultural heritage, including archaeology, are set out in the applicant's Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (CHIA). It considers the cumulative effect of the substation and solar farm developments. The report is based on desk based, historic and cartographic research (study area included substation, permitted solar farm and adjoining Derryclare solar farm, Table 2 and Figure 5), the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), initial archaeological assessment, geophysical surveys, walkover survey and archaeological testing and monitoring.
- 6.85. Recorded sites of cultural heritage interest are shown in Tables 4 to 8 and associated Figures. These indicate a rich archaeological heritage in the study area, for example including:
- 27 no. archaeological sites in the study area (more in the wider area), recorded in the RMP and/or SMR, with no sites falling with the substation footprint. In the area of the permitted solar farm is ME043-007, a Church and graveyard (ME043-007001) and enclosure (ME043-008) and location of a possible deserted medieval village.

- 11 no. archaeological investigations, in the study area, of which 7 no. uncovered archaeological remains (all outside the footprint of the solar farm and substation).
- A Protected Structure and historic garden associated with Spring Valley House c.600m to the south of the substation site.

6.86. Investigative works provide further information on areas of archaeological potential and include an initial archaeological assessment, geophysical survey, archaeological testing (eighteen test trenches in Field 10, for a total of 734 linear metres, see Table 11, Figure 17) and archaeological monitoring of geotechnical investigation of the substation site and access track.

6.87. Within this context the CHIA identifies the potential for effects on 21 no. items of cultural heritage assets (CHAs), with many of the features identified in the geophysics survey (Table 13, Figure 20). Conclusions are in respect of the substation site and access track (permitted under Clonmeath Solar Farm) are:

- No Recorded Monuments, National Monuments, Protected Structures or other recorded archaeological or built heritage features will be impacted by the substation development.
- Potential impacts could occur to undesignated cultural heritage including 11 no. CHAs and 10 no. areas of archaeological potential (AAPs) (Figure 20), including:
 - Direct impacts on AAP27 (isolated features, possible pits), AAP71 (three pits), AAP28 (break of slope) and AAP72 (possible *fulachta fiadh*).
 - Direct impacts on AAP32 (Moynalvy River) and AAP33 (Clonmeath River), with upgrade and new bridge over rivers respectively and potential for direct impacts on undesignated cultural heritage.
 - Direct impacts on townland boundaries (CH29, CH31 and CH30).
 - Potential direct impacts on features associated with the bi-vallate enclosure CH23, including possible ditch feature (CH24), faint curvilinear response (AAP24) and possible field boundary (AAP25).
 - A potential direct impact to the sub-rectangular enclosure (CH25), given its proximity to the access track and SID footprint.
 - Potential impact on CH28 (site of structure and pump at entrance to access road) and caution at location of CH34 (bridge) with potential for impact by movement of plant due to its proximity to the site entrance.

- Possibility of effects on features associated with CH26 (enclosure and its associated features, CH27, AAP31), due to proximity of access track.
- No impacts on northern extent of Spring Valley Demesne (CH92) as the area is now forested.

6.88. The CHIA refers to the LVIA and having regard to the limited visibility of the substation and grid connection, does not identify any significant cumulative landscape or visual effects on the setting of features of cultural heritage interest. However, having regard to the overall geophysical results within Clonmeath and the surrounding townlands, it is considered that there is archaeological potential in the region and undesignated cultural heritage may be impacted by more than one development.

6.89. The CHIA sets out recommendations including the following (see also Table 14):

- A wade and metal detection survey where bridge span works occur within 10m of watercourses (AAP32 and AAP33, Figure20) and 10m either side, carried out under licence issued by NMS.
- That the areas of AAP27 and AAP71 (Figure 20), and any associated features, that may be revealed during topsoil stripping undergo full archaeological excavation and preservation by record in advance of construction (subject to licence).
- Archaeological monitoring during all site preparation works, topsoil stripping and subsurface works within the substation site, the temporary construction compound, access tracks and any other related infrastructure (under licence from NMS).
- Consultation with Architectural Conservation Officer to determine the significance of bridge CH34, with potential for strategy/measures to ensure its protection (proposed haul road does not use this route/bridge).
- Care, to avoid damage to townland boundaries (CH29, CH30, CH31 and CH32) during construction (Figures 19 and 20).

6.90. Assessment

6.91. The CHIA is comprehensive, drawing on desk study of known cultural heritage assets and features (including past survey work), site survey, geophysical survey, monitoring of geotechnical survey and test trenching. It has identified archaeological

features that will be directly affected, the potential for other direct effects on known features and for possible effects on unknown archaeological features. It has also considered cumulative effects with other solar farm development (including related infrastructure), on the setting of cultural heritage assets. Proposed mitigation measures address direct effects and potential effects, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is broadly in agreement with the findings, subject to inclusion of recommended conditions in any grant of permission. Similarly, I consider that the conclusions drawn in the CHIA are reasonable and that subject to the implementation of proposed mitigation measures, I am largely satisfied that no significant effects on cultural heritage will arise, directly, indirectly or in combination with other developments in the wider area (see also LVIA section below).

- 6.92. The PA recommend further information in relation to the cultural heritage impact assessment (CHIA) to address the following matters, which I comment on below:

Survey anomalies in vicinity of ME043-007.

- 6.93. This feature is within the site of the permitted solar farm and will not be impacted by the proposed development. As stated by the applicant in response, the archaeology of the site is protected by condition no. 9 of ABP-311760 which provides for the archaeological appraisal of the site and for the preservation, recording and protection of archaeological materials or features. I also note that the applicant also states that there is extensive licenced archaeological testing ongoing to comply with this condition and appropriate exclusion zones and other mitigation measures are to be submitted to the NMS and a detailed compliance submission to the PA in advance of construction. I am satisfied therefore that ME043-007 is afforded adequate protection under the permission granted by the Board for Clonmeath Solar Farm and, having regard to its location outside of the application boundary, it would be inappropriate to impose any further conditions in respect of it.

Blanket trial trench testing, to raise percentage to 12%, with rescue excavation in advance of construction if required.

- 6.94. The applicant argues that test excavations carried out equate to 8.5% of the site area (734.6 linear meters x 1.8m equates to 1,320m² = 8.5% of the site area, redline boundary 2.36ha; footprint of substation, access track and towers is

1.55ha/15,500m²). Further, with the blanket licensed geophysical survey carried out for substation and solar farm, the %age testing area is typically reduced. It is also stated that the applicant has no object to further licensed testing of the substation development footprint, in the instance that it removes the requirement for monitoring during construction.

6.95. Having regard to:

- The detailed and extensive survey work carried out on site to date, which I consider to be adequate given the full geophysical survey carried out and test trenching of 8.5% of the footprint of the substation and associated development,
- The features that have been identified and the acknowledged potential for further archaeological features,
- The applicant's mitigation measures which include archaeological monitoring of all site preparation works, topsoil stripping and subsurface works within the substation site, the temporary construction compound, access tracks and any other related infrastructure (under licence from NMS), and
- The proposal for excavation and recording of any features or deposits found (subject to agreement with the NMS),

6.96. I am satisfied that the archaeological resource of the site (known and unknown) is best protected by the applicant's proposed mitigation measures, in conjunction with the conditions recommended by the Department.

Clarification of mitigation proposals in respect of CH23, 24 and 25 and potential for effect on CH26.

6.97. CH23 and CH24 lie to the north of the proposed substation site, and CH26 to the east of it. All three, fall within the footprint of the permitted solar farm. As stated above, the archaeology of the solar farm site is protected by condition no. 9 of ABP-311760, and I do not consider it appropriate that the potential for effects on it are addressed under this development. In addition, the applicant has identified the potential for features associated with these cultural heritage features to extend into the development site. However, as stated above, I consider that the archaeological potential of the site can be safeguarded by the applicant's proposed mitigation measures, which include archaeological monitoring of all site preparation works, topsoil stripping and subsurface works under licence from the NMS.

6.98. CH25 (possible square enclosure) is omitted from both the subject development and permitted solar farm. I note that the applicant states that this feature has been identified and omitted from the development during pre-planning assessments and can be fenced off to avoid accidental damage. This matter can be addressed by condition.

Survey of Cloneymeath Bridge (CH34) and former farm pump (CH28).

6.99. Cloneymeath Bridge is situated c. 100m north of the consented site entrance. It is not located on the identified haul route to the site, is not a protected structure and carries a large volume of traffic daily (Figure 4, TTA). Further, access to the solar farm has been granted under ABP-311760. Condition no. 11 of the permission requires the developer to comply with the transportation requirements of the PA. And survey of the bridge can be addressed, if required, under this condition.

6.100. I have inspected the site of the proposed substation and access from the L2210, including the farmyard in which the former farm pump is situated. I found no evidence of this pump and the applicant has stated that it has been replaced, by a previous owner, by a pumped water supply. I am satisfied therefore that there is no requirement for any survey work in respect of it.

Written sketched and photographic record of townland boundaries (CH29-32).

6.101. I note that the applicant's CHIA identifies these features and includes a recommendation that care should be taken to avoid damage to townland boundaries. This matter can be addressed by condition. With the implementation of this I consider it unnecessary to require sketched and photographic records in case of accidental damage.

6.102. Landscape and visual effects

6.103. The PA refer raise concerns regarding the absence of visibility of the proposed substation in any of viewpoints presented, despite solar panels being visible in many locations and the height of proposed structures. They invite the Board request FI in this regard, with other viewpoints potentially considered and in respect of cumulative effects with other solar farm development, including from the Hill of Tara (View and Prospect No. 44, Meath CDP). If permission granted, the PA invite the Board to

condition that wildflower seeds should be collected from the local area/or land allowed to recolonise naturally.

6.104. The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment report (LVIA) (November 2023) assesses the combined landscape and visual effects arising from the proposed substation and permitted solar farm and potential cumulative effects with similar development in the area. Field survey and desktop assessment established that the extent of the study area for the assessment can be confined to 5km from the centre of the development site, with the development not likely to have landscape or visual effects outside of this radius. Map 2 of the report provides a Zone of Theoretical Visibility. I draw the Board's attention to section 2.5 of the report which states that '*The ZTV would typically apply to the solar infrastructure only and does not consider visibility of site-specific grid connection or substation elements*'. I assume therefore that the ZTV does not include the proposed substation.

6.105. The substation and solar farm site are situated in the 'Lowland Area' Landscape Character Type and the site, and its study area fall within three Landscape Character Areas of the Meath CDP (see Figures 5-7), summarised here:

- LCA6 Central Lowlands (site of substation) – High landscape value, medium landscape sensitivity and regional landscape importance. Large lowland landscape of rolling drumlins interspersed with numerous estates and parkland. Medium capacity to accommodate overhead cables, substations and communication masts due to the complexity of the area, which has a variety of land uses and a robust landscape structure.
- LCA12 Tara Skryne Hills (to the east of the substation) – Exceptional landscape value, high landscape sensitivity and national/international landscape importance. Broad rolling hills, separated by a mixture of well managed small and large fields enclosed by thick thorn hedgerows and mature trees. Panoramic views from the Hill of Tara. Skryne Church, a prominent landmark, lies to the east of the area. Low capacity to accommodate overhead cables, substations and communication masts due to their visual prominence and high sensitivity of the LCA.
- LCA13 Rathmolyon Lowlands (southwest of substation) - High landscape value, high landscape sensitivity and national landscape importance. Rolling hills and lowland with a mix of pastoral and arable farms. Low potential to accommodate

overhead cables, substations and communication masts due to their visual prominence and high sensitivity of the LCA.

6.106. Protected views are shown in Map 7 of the LVIA, with no views within 5km of the development site and with VP 51, VP 77 and VP 84, situated outside the 5km study area, to the northwest, north-east and south of the site. Protected structures are typically clustered around Summerhill and Galtrim (to the north of the site), with others to the west of the site. The nearest protected structure is Spring Valley House, c.600m to the south of the substation site and separated from it by plantation woodland. Archaeological heritage features are shown in Map 10, Appendix 2 and include in the immediate area of the substation and solar farm site, ME043-006 (castle-motte) and ME043-007 (church) along with associated graveyard (ME043-007001) and a potential deserted medieval village, with upstanding features including earthworks and possible gravestones. The LVIA report acknowledges that the development site (substation and solar farm) is in a wider medieval landscape, including field systems and probable historic roadways.

6.107. The LVIA report predicts that the landscape effects would be:

- Due to the predominantly low-lying nature of the development, and the containment provided by the dense field hedgerows and tall mature trees around the boundary of the proposed site, the effects on the area's landscape character will be mainly limited to the immediate local area surrounding the proposed site.
- The fields where the proposed solar farm would be installed would be substantially screened by the dense existing tree hedgerows. The 110kV substation and overhead cable interface, surrounded by forestry and well established tree and hedgerow boundaries, will be effectively assimilated within the existing landscape features.
- There would be a short term, imperceptible adverse effect to the landscape during the temporary construction period (up to 12 months) and decommissioning (change in land use, restricted to site boundary due to enclosure by hedgerows and plantation providing a good visual barrier).
- There would be a short term imperceptible adverse effect on the landscape during operation (35 years) (change in land use and landscape character, distinctive man-made feature, field system and field boundaries would remain

unaltered, screening the low-lying development). Beneficial effects would arise from biodiversity enhancement measures.

- The proposed site and surrounds represent the key attributes of LCA6, such as well managed patchwork of small to medium sized pastoral fields and dense hedgerows. The undulating lowland river valley landscape around the site and the layers of vegetation of mature hedgerows and trees provide no views of the proposed solar development. There would be an imperceptible adverse effect on landscape character of LCA6 within the study area.
- The baseline study of ZVT suggests there would be (a) no effects on Hill of Tara (c.12km from site, well outside of 5km), (b) no views of the proposed solar development on the Tara Skryne Hills LCA to the east of the proposed site due to topography, and (c) potential slight views of less than 20% of the solar farm from some areas of Springvalley and Ballygortagh within LCA12 to the south of and south east of the site (Map 2 and 5). Overall, an imperceptible adverse effect on landscape character of LCA12 is predicted.
- The baseline study of ZVT suggests there would be less than 20% of the proposed development visible from a few areas within LCA13 (Map 2 and 5), however site visits suggest no views from these areas. Overall, no change on landscape character of LCA13 is predicted.
- The development would interfere with no protected view or prospect.
- There would be a minor/imperceptible adverse effect on the landscape setting of ME043-006, during the operation of the development. The development would have an imperceptible effect on the landscape setting of ME043-007 (church) and ME043-007001 (associated graveyard) and northeastern boundary of the postulated DMV (some low relief earthen bank remains and headstones).

6.108. Effects on visual resources (views from residential properties, local roads, visitor attractions and scenic routes) and visual receptors (viewers from residential properties around the site), having regard to desk top survey, site survey and representative, specific and illustrative viewshed reference points (VRP1 to VRP9, Appendix 2, Map 8 and Appendix 3 photomontages) are predicted to be:

- VRP1 to VRP9 – No views of substation, due to the low ground elevation and dense extant of hedgerow screening.

- VRP1, 4, 5, 6 8 and 9 - Limited and distant views of the solar farm, from elevated locations and of elevated parts of the development e.g. fields 2, 6 and 13. With overall, minor/imperceptible effects VRP1, VRP4 and VRP9 and no change VRP 2, VRP3, VRP 5 to 8.
- The LVIA notes that field work was carried out during the winter when there is a lack of foliage and hedgerows are clipped back, giving a worst-case scenario.
- The nearest residential property to the development is the applicant, c.60m from the solar farm and substation infrastructure (to the north of the solar farm), surrounded by farm buildings. Other residential receptors are at considerable distance from the solar farm and substation (>500m).
- The LVIA concludes that the proposed site is well screened from most receptors, located at distance from residential receptors and the layers of dense and well-established hedgerows and mature trees contain the site from local roads.

6.109. Given the absence of landscape or visual effects, mitigation measures are limited and include new hedgerow planting at site entrance, retention of boundary and internal field hedgerows, providing additional shrub and tree planting within existing hedgerows using native species (if required), fields to be seeded with a suitable approved meadow mix of wildflower and grassland species and periodically managed by mowing, finish to ancillary structures including MV power stations and battery modules to be painted a subtle colour to help blend with the surroundings (to be agreed with the PA).

6.110. Residual effects will be the change of existing farming practice from livestock and tillage to renewable energy production with new pasture and improved hedgerows, with neutral to beneficial effect for the duration of the development. At end of life, the structures can be removed, and the site returned to an agricultural use with neutral effects.

6.111. Cumulative effects are considered having regard to permitted and proposed solar farms around the site (Map 3). These are Clonymeath solar farm, Derryclare solar farm, Knockstown solar farm, Woodtown solar farm and Culmullin 220kV substation. The LVIA states:

- The nearby consented Derryclare solar farm is well assimilated within the landscape with a high degree of natural screening, and it is unlikely that

Clonymeath solar farm will be seen in either combined, successive or sequential views considered in the appraisal with this consented solar farm.

- There is a good degree of separation between the Clonymeath solar farm, Knockstown solar farm and Woodtown solar farm. It is unlikely that Clonymeath solar farm will be seen in either combined, successive or sequential views considered in the appraisal with this consented solar farm.
- The proposed solar farm will increase the physical extent of solar farm development within the southeastern part of LCA 6 marginally.
- No additional cumulative effect on the landscape setting of ME043-006 due to nearby consented developments. No cumulative effect on other cultural heritage features identified in the assessments.
- The proposed Clonymeath substation electrical infrastructure in combination with Culmullin substation will lead to a marginal increase in localised electrical infrastructure, by inserting a small number of additional overhead interface towers within existing overhead lines. Cumulative effect on landscape character is assessed as minor/imperceptible as the developments are well contained within the landscape.

6.112. Assessment

6.113. I have inspected the substation site, solar farm site and surrounding area. I have viewed the development site from the public road network, including the viewpoints identified in the LVIA and from the Hill of Tara (panoramic views, Protected View no. 44, MCDP).

6.114. The application site comprises an agricultural field. The proposed development alone, and in combination with the proposed solar farm, will have a significant landscape and visual effect on the immediate area of the site, including on the landscape context and setting of remaining upstanding features of cultural heritage. Notwithstanding this, the landscape around the site is 'contained' or 'closed', with views of adjoining farmland from the public road network typically prevented due to a combination of roadside banks, hedgerows, treelines, woodland, topography and roadside development. The applicant's photomontages have been taken mostly from gaps in roadside boundaries, as illustrated in the attached photographs. In this context, I would accept that the applicant's 5km radius study area is appropriate, with

views of the substation and solar farm site, highly unlikely outside of this distance. Similarly, from the Hill of Tara the development, by itself or in combination with other solar farms, will not be discernible in the working landscape.

6.115. I have noted that the ZVT does not include specific reference to the proposed substation. However, the substation site is situated on low lying land, north of Cloneymeath River. Due to the character of the landscape around the site, as explained, and the low-lying nature of the site, the existing polesets on the substation site are not visible in any views of it from the public road network. The existing polesets have a height of 18m. They will be replaced by steel lattice towers with a height of 13m, with all 4 structures below a maximum height 89mAOD i.e. < that the c.93mAOD height I estimate for the existing polesets. Most structures within the proposed substation will be relatively modest in height, except for the taller slimmer structures of lighting masts and gantries, with a height of c.95mAOD. Whilst situated further north in field 10 than the existing poleset, the substation site is not likely to be highly visible from the public roads/public domain within 5km of the site due to its elevation and the strong, closed landscape context and modest height of structures. There may be some visibility of the taller, slim lighting masts. However, at distance these will be difficult to discern and will be seen in many views against the coniferous woodland to the south of the site. I am satisfied therefore that there is no potential for significant landscape or visual effects arising from the substation or, therefore, potential for significant cumulative effects with the permitted Clonymeath Solar Farm or other solar farms or substations proposed within 5km of the development. As indicated in the LVIA, due to the contained nature of the landscape and/or distance between developments, whilst there would be an increase in the physical extent of solar farms and associated infrastructure in the area, there will be limited intervisibility of infrastructure viewed from the public road/public domain. I note that in the Board's assessment of Clonymeath, Derryclare, and Woodtown solar farms, it was accepted, that significant cumulative effects would not arise. Similarly, the PA has accepted that significant cumulative effects will not arise with Knockstown solar farm (RA170766 – likely now expired).

6.116. The PA invite the Board to consider specific conditions for the establishment of species rich grassland on the development site, in the interest of biodiversity. The subject development site comprises a mix of hard surfaces, and agricultural land

below the proposed extended OHLs. It is not unreasonable that the agricultural component be subject to similar biodiversity enhancement measures as the adjoining solar farm site, in the interest of biodiversity net gain and a coordinated approach to the management of lands within the site. This matter can be addressed by condition and can refer to the grassland establishment methods proposed by the PA.

6.117. Development contributions and bond

6.118. The PA recommend a development contribution in line with the current Development Contribution Scheme 2024-2029 (recommended condition no. 39) and a cash deposit/security to secure the satisfactory restoration of the site on cessation (condition no. 40). Condition no. 39 refers to Fingal County Council's development contribution scheme and in their submission to the Board, the PA accept that substation infrastructure is not subject to development contributions. I am satisfied therefore, that in this instance, there is no requirement for a condition in respect of development contributions.

6.119. As indicated by the applicant, it is not intended to decommission the proposed substation. Instead, it will become a permanent part of the national transmission system, under the operation of EirGrid. I am satisfied, therefore, that there is no need for a security bond in this instance to secure the satisfactory restoration of the site.

6.120. Community Projects

6.121. The PA's recommended condition no. 41 provides (a) a mechanism for the identification of environmental community projects, to be decided upon by a community liaison committee (CLC), with CLC comprising equal representation of personnel from the PA, developer, local residents and elected members, and (b) the payment of a sum of money to the PA towards the cost of environmental improvement and recreational or community amenities in the locality, with projects decided upon by the PA having consulted the community liaison committee (above).

6.122. In response, the applicant argues that the condition is not relevant to the substation site, which will be owned and operated by EirGrid, with the community benefit fund more appropriately associated with the consented solar farm (ABP-311760) and that the applicant is committed to establish a Community Benefit Fund (CBF) in line with

national guidance (Renewable Electricity Support Scheme Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds, Gol 2021). It is also stated that the arrangements proposed by the PA run counter to the Government's guidelines.

6.123. Under the terms of the government's Renewable Energy Support Scheme, benefiting developers are required to provide a CBF at a rate of €2 per megawatt hour of generation of the RESS project. The Government's 2021 Good Practice Principles identify key stakeholders in the community, how the fund is to be divided and managed, including funding decisions.

6.124. In this instance, the proposed development is an electricity substation, facilitating connectivity of the permitted solar farm to the transmission system, to be owned and operated by EirGrid. As argued by the applicant, any CBF is more properly associated with the permitted solar farm. Further, any operation of the fund should be in accordance with the Best Practice Guidelines, issued by government. I am satisfied therefore, that it would be inappropriate to condition any provision of a CBF for the subject development or to prescribe the structure of it, or any mechanism for decision making that is inconsistent with the government's guidelines.

6.125. **Other matters**

6.126. The PA raise the following other matters in their submission, which I comment on below:

No reference to statutory undertaker.

6.126.1. The term 'statutory undertaker' is defined in section 2 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended, and means a person who is '*authorised by or under any enactment or instrument under an enactment to...provide, or carry out works for the provision of, gas, electricity or telecommunications services, or .. provide services connected with, or carry out works for the purposes of the carrying on of the activities of, any public undertaking*'. Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, refers to and defines the term 'undertaker' in respect of electricity transmission lines as, '*a person [who] intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission*'. There is no reference to any statutory role required to implement any development permitted under section 182A. I am satisfied therefore that there is no requirement for the

applicant to hold the status of a statutory undertaker or that the application documents need refer to this.

Community Liaison Officer (CLO)

6.126.2. In their observations, the PA recommend that, if permission is granted, the appointment of a CLO for the development. In response the applicant supports the appointment of a CLO and provides details of this on the SID project website www.clonymeathsubstation.ie. It is reasonable that there is a point of contact for the public for the proposed development e.g. during construction, and given the applicant's response to the issue, I am satisfied that this matter can be addressed by condition.

6.127. Conditions of the permission.

6.128. The PA recommend certain conditions to be attached to any grant of permission. The applicant raises concerns in respect of a number these, some of which have been addressed above (nos. 3, 10, 13, 38-41). The remainder are addressed below.

Recommended condition	Applicant response	Assessment/Recommendation
12. Requires landscaping to be carried out at appropriate times and appropriately maintained.	No landscaping proposed within boundary of substation development.	There is no landscaping proposed within the red line boundary of the site. However, as indicated above, I consider it appropriate that the area under the proposed OHL is integrated with the biodiversity enhancement measures adopted for the solar farm site.
26. Proposes construction and operation noise limits and requires annual noise monitoring.	Nearest receptor at c.679m, predicted max. construction and operational noise less than standard limits, monitoring is not warranted.	Nearest receptors are removed from the site, however, in the interest of residential amenity, I would recommend that construction noise is controlled via the CEMP, to be agreed with the PA. In view of the low level of operational predicted noise, I do not consider noise monitoring is necessary but again a

		standard operational noise condition would protect residential amenity.
30 & 32. Requires compliance with Waste Management Regulations for the import of soil and stone	Stone required for hardcore areas, to be sourced from licenced quarry. It is not reasonable that importation of stone should be subject to a waste facility permit.	It is not unreasonable that stone from licenced quarries be imported to the site. Compliance with the waste management regulations is a matter for another code.
31. Limits vibration from construction activities.	There is negligible vibration impact predicted given the confined development site area, limited construction activity proposed and distance from receptors.	I accept the points made by the applicant and consider that in view of the distance of sensitive receptors from the site, a condition limiting vibration is not necessary. However, good practices in respect of the generation and management of vibration can be addressed by the applicant in the CEMP.
33. Requires site to be maintained in a neat and tidy condition during operation and excludes storage of material.	There will be some storage of construction materials on site during construction only.	This condition is not necessary, as (a) maintenance of IPP and EirGrid components will be directly influenced by/managed by EirGrid and (b) the applicant has not sought permission to stockpile material on site during operation, and any such activity would be <i>ultra vires</i> .

7.0 Appropriate Assessment

7.1. Screening

- 7.2. The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to screening the need for appropriate assessment of a project under part XAB, section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) are considered fully in this section.

Background on the Application

- 7.3. The applicant has submitted a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) as part of the planning application, 'Clonmeath 110kV Substation Natura Impact Statement'. Section 5 of the report comprises a Stage 1 Screening report. The report was prepared in line with current best practice guidance, identified in section 2.2. It provides a description of the proposed development and identifies European Sites within a possible zone of influence of the development. It has regard to desk study and field survey and the nature, scale and form of the proposed development, in combination with the permitted Clonmeath solar farm. The NIS acknowledges that the field survey was carried out at a sub-optimal time of year (January 2021). However, it is considered that given the habitats present on site, primarily improved agricultural grassland, and the experience of the surveyor carrying out the survey, the seasonal constraint is not considered an impediment to assessing potential effects on Natura 2000 sites. The applicants AA Screening Report concluded that it is not possible to rule out the potential for significant effects on European sites and therefore a Stage 2 AA is required.
- 7.4. Having reviewed the documents and submissions on file, and notably having regard to the findings of the additional field survey work carried out in September 2023 (see Ecological Impact Assessment above), inspection of the field site, the scale, nature and form of the proposed development, in combination with the permitted Clonmeath solar farm, and likely influence of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the information allows for a complete examination and identification of any potential significant effects of the development, alone, or in combination with other plans and projects on European sites.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment – Test of Likely Significant Effects

- 7.5. The project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site and therefore it needs to be determined if the development is likely to have significant effects on a European site(s). The proposed development is examined in relation to any possible interaction with European sites designated Special Conservation Areas (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) to assess whether it may give rise to significant effects on any European Site.

The Development

- 7.6. The applicant provides a description of the project in section 3 of the NIS and in section 4 of the Planning Report. It is also summarised in section 2 of this report. In the interest of brevity, it is not repeated here.
- 7.7. The Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) provides details on how the development will be constructed and the controls or measures to be put in place to mitigate the potential for adverse environmental effects. Proposed methods are common and best practice measures, which are effective at offsetting effects e.g. for the protection of water quality, management hazardous materials, emergency response.
- 7.8. The solar farm development is described in section 3.1.3 of the NIS and includes construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic array erected on galvanised steel mounting frames over an area of 91.9ha, to include up to 30 no. MV power stations, internal solar PV farm underground electrical cabling and ducting, security fencing, CCTV security camera stands, 2 no. construction compounds, a module BESS compound (up to 5 no. battery modules) and associated site development works. Access to the solar farm and proposed substation is by permitted new entrance off the L2210 to the east of the development site. Up to 4.6km of new internal access track will be constructed as part of the solar farm to facilitate access during construction and operation. Access tracks will range from 4-6m and in depth from 250-500mm depending on soil conditions. A permeable geogrid membrane will be placed along the excavated track and the road will be constructed on top of this using stone and gravel. Where required, pipes will be placed within or beneath the track structure to ensure existing natural drainage and surface water systems are maintained. As part of the permitted solar far, two no. new span bridges will be constructed to cater for construction and operational traffic (replacement of existing

on-site slab/bridge over Cloneymeath River and new span bridge structure over OPW arterial drainage channel C1/16/14).

The Development Site

7.9. The development site, and the wider consented solar farm site, is described in section 3.2 of the NIS and in other technical documents submitted with the application. In summary, it comprises:

- The substation and solar farm site lie in a lowland landscape. The substation site comprises improved agricultural grassland and the consented solar farm site, comprises mainly improved agricultural grassland (pasture and arable) and semi-improved, species poor wet grassland in low lying parts of the site. Field boundaries comprise hedgerows, drainage ditches, treelines and to a lesser extent stone walls.
- Several depositing/lowland rivers around the site, including:
 - The Cloneymeath River, south of the substation site (also referred to as the Knightsbrook River, and OPW channel C1/16).
 - Springvalley Stream, which joins Cloneymeath River to the south of the substation site.
 - Arterial drainage channel C1/16/14, also to the south of the site, which joins the Cloneymeath River, again to the south of the site.
 - An unnamed land drain adjacent to the western site boundary.
 - The Dangan River, also referred to as the Ballynamona River, and OPW channel X1C1/16, to the north of the substation site.
- The watercourses fall within the Boyne_SC_060 WFD sub-catchment. Springvalley Stream and Cloneymeath River are all parts of the Knightsbrook_010 waterbody, Poor and At Risk, WFD status 2016-2021 (biotic Q sampling at Dangan Bridge 2.6km downstream = Q3, 2020, moderately polluted).
- Knightsbrook River is known to support Atlantic Salmon, brown trout and lamprey (most likely downstream of the site where there is more potential for salmonid spawning).
- No otter or Kingfisher recorded on/near the site. Nearest records for otter are c.2.6km downstream of proposed substation and for Kingfisher the River Boyne upstream and downstream of Trim.

Implications for European Sites

7.10. Taking account of the characteristics of the proposed development in terms of its location and the scale of works, the following issues are considered for examination in terms of implications for likely significant effects on European sites:

- Effects on surface water quality during construction and operation (e.g. arising from increased siltation, contamination with petrochemicals, cement).
- Impacts on groundwater quality and groundwater dependent habitats and species (e.g. from changes to groundwater levels and/or pollution of groundwater).
- Habitat loss/fragmentation/change and/or disturbance, if habitats on site used by mobile species populations of conservation interest.
- Collision risk to mobile species populations that are Qis/SCIs from solar panels.
- In combination effects.

Submissions and Observations

7.11. The DAU has accepted the conclusions of the EIAR and NIS, that with the implementation of mitigation measures, no significant impacts on water quality and European sites will arise.

European Sites

7.12. The proposed development site is not located in or immediately adjacent to a European site. It is upstream of the River Boyne, with surface waters from the site ultimately discharging into the river to the east of Trim. At this point, the River Boyne is designated as the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA and SAC. Both European sites are therefore within the zone of influence of the development. Qualifying interests/SCIs are summarised below. No other European sites are within the zone of influence of the development i.e. they are physically removed and/or have no hydrological connection.

Table AA 1: Summary of European Sites within a possible zone of influence of the proposed development

European site (code)	QI/SCI	Distance from development	Connection	Considered further (Y/N)

River Boyne & River Blackwater SAC (004232)	Alkaline fens [7230] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	c. 12.5km downstream	Yes (hydrology)	Yes
River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (site code)	Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]	c. 12.5km downstream	Yes (hydrology)	Yes

Identification of Effects

- 7.13. The construction and operational phase of the proposed substation development, alone and in combination with the permitted solar farm, have potential to impact on water quality in water courses that drain the site, and which lie downstream of it e.g. increased siltation, contamination by hydrocarbons, physical works in proximity to waterbodies (with effects on aquatic ecology). Such effects, have the potential to impact on downstream water quality dependent habitats and species which are QIs or SCIs of European sites.
- 7.14. The development site and the European sites lie within the Trim Groundwater Body. However, no substantial works are proposed to significantly impact on groundwater levels e.g. dewatering. Further given the distance of the development site from the River Boyne, the likely dissipating and diluting effects of intervening soils, no adverse effects on groundwater are likely on the European sites, as a result of contamination during construction or operation. Other solar farms are proposed within the sub-catchment (Boyne_SC_060), and there is potential therefore for cumulative effects on water quality.
- 7.15. The proposed development and solar farm will be constructed largely on intensively farmed agricultural land (pasture and arable crops). Land take, for the substation

and solar farm, will not result in habitat loss of any *ex situ* Annex I habitats associated with the European sites, as they do not occur within the site. No instream works are proposed and there is no potential for physical loss of or disturbance to aquatic habitat. However, if surface water discharges are not managed, there is potential for local hydromorphological effects only.

- 7.16. Field survey found no signs of otter along water courses in the consented solar farm site or proposed substations. The NIS refers to a typical male otter territory of 15km and c.7.5km for females (although it is acknowledged that territories are highly variable). The NIS therefore states that it is possible, but unlikely, that an otter territory may include both the SAC and watercourses in or near the proposed development. Disturbance any effects are also considered unlikely to be significant given the absence of observed signs, evidence of lack of sensitivity to disturbance and likelihood of the species to forage alongside working locations, outside of working hours (adverse effects screened out). The screening exercise identifies the potential for effects on prey if water quality significantly affected.
- 7.17. The NIS refers to 2020 research which found that Kingfisher had a density of 0.12 territories per km and an average territory length of c.8.3km along the River Boyne (the Knightsbrook River and upstream tributaries were not surveyed in the 2010 research) and 1977 research which indicated territories of <9km. The NIS therefore considers that it is highly unlikely that a Kingfisher from the River Boyne (8+km from the SPA) would make regular use of the watercourses in the vicinity of the wind farm. This conclusion is not unreasonable, given the absence of observation of the species on/near the site, the likely territory length and poor water quality in the area of the site which is likely to impact on prey. Collision risk for Kingfisher is also considered to be low given their unlikely use of the site, their hunting behaviour with use of perches over water from which to scan fish (which make collision risk extremely unlikely) and the limited research available which suggests that collision risk at solar farms is low and dependent on the behaviour of the species in question.
- 7.18. In combination effects refer to the multiple pressures on the Cloneymeth/Knightsbrook River system which have resulted in historically poor ecological conditions for much of the sub-catchment e.g. surface water pollution, changes to hydromorphology, urban and development discharges. The screening exercise identifies projects in the same catchment as the proposed substation

including the following, with the potential for further in-combination effects on water quality:

- The permitted Derryclare, Woodtown and Knockstown solar farms and the proposed Culmullin 220kV substation,
- Infilling and materials reclamation adjacent to the closed Basketstown Landfill site, 100m to the north of the consented Clonymeath Solar Farm.
- Active Kilsaran sand and gravel quarry, c.710m north of the permitted Clonymeath solar farm and proposed substation.
- A bioenergy renewable facility at Windtown, c.1.3km northwest of the permitted solar farm and proposed substation.
- Additional sources of pressure on water quality within the sub-catchment from smaller building projects and agricultural activity.

7.19. I also note that Summerhill Wastewater Works are situated downstream of the development site, with water discharged to Clonemyeth River downstream of the development site under EPA Wastewater Discharge Licence D0259-01. Capacity of the plant is 3000 PE, and it serves an urban area of 1,102PE i.e. it currently operates below capacity. Further, I note that in 2021, the Annual Environmental Report indicated noncompliance with certain parameters failing (ammonia, BOD). In 2023 a Licence Audit report shows compliance with emission limits.

Mitigation Measures

7.20. No measures designed or intended to avoid or reduce any harmful effects of the project on a European Site have been relied upon in this screening exercise.

7.21. Screening Determination

7.22. The proposed development was considered in light of the requirements of Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. Having carried out Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the project, it has been concluded that the project individually (or in combination with other plans or projects) could have a significant effect on European Site No. 002299 and 004232, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives, and Appropriate Assessment (and submission of a NIS) is therefore required. The determination is based on the hydrological connectivity to the two European sites, the potential for adverse effects on downstream water

quality and water quality dependent habitats and species and the potential for cumulative effects.

7.23. Appropriate Assessment

- 7.24. The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to appropriate assessment of a project under part XAB, section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) are considered fully in this section.

The Natura Impact Statement

- 7.25. The applicant's 'Clonmeath Substation Natura Impact Statement' examines and assess potential adverse effects of the proposed development on the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA. It has regard to the nature, scale and form of the proposed development, the adjoining permitted solar farm, other developments in the wider area of the site, potential for adverse effects on water quality, the potential for *ex situ* effects on mobile species and proposed mitigation measures. The NIS was prepared in line with current best practice.
- 7.26. For the reasons set out in detail in the NIS, in light of best scientific knowledge and having regard to all aspects of the project, by itself, and in combination with other plans or projects, the NIS considers that the information in the NIS ensures that the competent authority is capable of determining that all reasonable scientific doubt has been removed as to the effects of the proposed project on the relevant Natura 2000 sites and that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. Submissions and observations in respect of the proposed development are set out above.
- 7.27. Having reviewed the documents submitted with the application and having regard to the comments made by the Department, which accept the conclusions of the NIS, I am satisfied that the information allows for a complete assessment of any adverse effects of the development, on the conservation objectives of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA alone, or in combination with other plans and projects.

Appropriate Assessment of Implications of the Proposed Development

- 7.28. The following is a summary of the objective scientific assessment of the implications of the project on the qualifying interest features of the European sites using the best

scientific knowledge in the field. All aspects of the project which could result in significant effects are assessed and mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce any adverse effects are considered and assessed.

European Sites

- 7.29. The River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA are subject to AA. A description of the sites and their Conservation Objectives, Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests, are set out in the NIS and summarised in Tables AA2 and AA3, below, as part of my assessment. I have also examined the Natura 2000 data forms as relevant and the Conservation Objectives supporting documents for these sites available through the NPWS website (www.npws.ie).

Aspects of the Proposed Development

- 7.30. The main aspects of the proposed development that could adversely affect the conservation objectives of the European sites are the potential for adverse effects on downstream water quality and water quality dependent habitats and species and the potential for cumulative effects with other existing and proposed development in the catchment. These effects are examined Tables AA2 and AA3 below.

Assessment

Table AA2 AA Summary Matrix River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC

<p>Key issues that could give rise to adverse effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential for effects on water quality and downstream water quality dependent habitats and species, the potential for cumulative effects. <p>Conservation objectives: To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected, by reference to defined attributes, measures and targets. Main threats/pressures: Industrial /commercial development, waste discharges, surface water pollution, invasive species, human made changes in hydrology (see also Table 2, NIS).</p>					
		Summary of Appropriate Assessment			Exclude adverse effects on integrity?
QI/SCI (conservation objective M or R)	Attributes and Targets	Potential adverse effects	Mitigation measures	In-combination effects	
Alkaline fens [7230] M	Habitat area stable/increasing; No decline in habitat distribution; Maintenance of parameters to support ecosystem function (including hydrological regime), vegetation composition/ diversity, physical structure, local	Groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystem. Not mapped in detail for SAC. Nearest documented fens occur at distance from site (>50km). NIS refers to nearest alkaline fen at Roristown c.9.5km from development site. No potential effects due to no significant excavations or alterations to groundwater flow/depth.	N/A	N/A	Yes

	distinctiveness and transitional areas.				
Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] R	Habitat area stable/increasing; No decline in habitat distribution; Woodland size stable or increasing; Maintenance of woodland structure; hydrological regime and vegetation composition.	Main areas of Alluvial forests are downstream of Navan Town and Slane, >50km from the development site. With dissipation no significant effects on the known habitat are likely. NPWS Conservation objectives state that further unsurveyed areas may be present within the SAC. Worst case scenario, potential for adverse effects on unknown areas downstream of site, arising from changes to water quality.	Standard best practice and proven mitigation measures are proposed, to prevent pollution from fuels, concrete and siltation. Measures include reference to IFI guidelines on the protection of fisheries during construction works, comprehensive surface water management system (construction and operation), with measures included in CEMP (section 6.3, NIS). Absence of effects is predicated on the comprehensive implementation of	Cloneymeth/ Knightsbrook River subject to numerous pressures on water quality, with consequential poor ecological conditions in the sub-catchment. Main pressures are agriculture, hydromorphology and urban runoff (diffuse sources of pollution) (Knightsbrook_010, WFD Cycle 2, Sub Catchment Boyne_SC_060). Permitted/proposed solar farms and associated infrastructure include and are predicated on measures to prevent deterioration	Yes.

			<p>mitigation measures. These can be expressly required by condition and can include monitoring of water quality upstream and downstream of the site prior to, during and post construction.</p>	<p>of water quality, in accordance with the requirements of the WFD.</p> <p>No cumulative effects are likely with operation of Summerhill Water Treatment plant, if it is operated in accordance with licenced conditions, as per most recent Audit.</p> <p>Development will not add to main pressures in catchment.</p> <p>With implementation of mitigation measures, which prevent deterioration of water quality, significant cumulative effects will not arise.</p> <p>Development plan policies require</p>	
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				developments to comply with WFD.	
Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099] R	Restore access to all waters (improve distribution, population structure and density), no decline in extent and distribution of spawning and nursery beds.	Potential effects from siltation and water pollution could affect distribution, population structure and distribution of spawning habitats.	Mitigation measures as above (for Alluvial forests).	In combination effects as above (for Alluvial forests).	Yes.
Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106] R	Increase percentage of river accessible to salmon, attain minimum number of adult spawning fish, salmon fry, no significant decline of out migrating smolt, no decline in the number of spawning redds, at	Atlantic salmon are known to be present in Knightsbrook River downstream of proposed development. Potential for loss of spawning gravels (redds) through siltation, loss of invertebrate prey due to decline in water quality, decline in juveniles, reduced salmon fry abundance, out-migrating smolt abundance and numbers of adult spawning fish returning to river.	Mitigation measures as above (for Alluvial forests).	In combination effects as above (for Alluvial forests).	Yes.

	least Q4 water quality.				
Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355] M	No significant decline in distribution, extent of terrestrial and freshwater habitat, couching sites and holts, fish biomass availability and no significant increase in barriers to connectivity.	NIS states, with reference to research, that otters are not directly affected by pollutants with the exception of significant events. Poor water quality is linked to low otter abundances but not consistently (lower prey abundance). In Ireland otter rely heavily on salmonids and eels and reductions in fish biomass available resulting from siltation or pollution would be expected to have a negative effect on otter population and distribution. However, otter rely on other food sources. Under precautionary principle, negative effects on Otter cannot be ruled out.	Mitigation measures as above (for Alluvial forests).	In combination effects as above (for Alluvial forests).	Yes.
Overall conclusion: Following the implementation of proposed mitigation measures, the construction and operation of the proposed development will not adversely affect the integrity of this European site and no reasonable doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.					

Table AA3 AA Summary Matrix River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA

<p>Key issues that could give rise to adverse effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential for effects on water quality and downstream water quality dependent habitats and species and the potential for cumulative effects. <p>Conservation objectives: To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Kingfisher by reference to defined attributes, measures and targets. Main threats/pressures: Roads, urbanised areas (see also Table 3, NIS).</p>					
		Summary of Appropriate Assessment			
QI/SCI (conservation objective M or R)	Attributes and Targets	Potential adverse effects	Mitigation measures	In-combination effects	Can adverse effects on integrity be excluded?
Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) [A229] M	No significant decline in long term population size, maintain stable or increasing productivity rate, no significant loss of distribution, maintain sufficient extent and quality of nesting banks/features, foraging habitat, high quality water status and no significant increase in barriers to connectivity or disturbance to breeding sites.	Kingfisher is dependent on fish for their diets. Water quality effects that reduce fish biomass have the potential to negatively affect Kingfisher survival and breeding success. Despite the distance substation and solar farm, to the SPA, the potential for negative effects on SPA Kingfisher populations cannot be ruled out.	As above, Table AA2 (for Alluvial forests).	As above, Table AA2 (for Alluvial forests).	Yes.
<p>Overall conclusion: Following the implementation of proposed mitigation measures, the construction and operation of the proposed development will not adversely affect the integrity of this European site and no reasonable doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.</p>					

7.31. Appropriate Assessment Conclusion

7.32. The proposed substation has been considered in light of the assessment requirements of Sections 177U and 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. Having carried out screening for Appropriate Assessment of the project, it was concluded that it may have a significant effect on the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA (site nos. 002299 and 004232 respectively). Consequently, an Appropriate Assessment was required of the implications of the project on the QI/SCIs of these sites, in light of its/their conservation objectives.

7.33. Following an Appropriate Assessment, it has been ascertained that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of the European site Nos. 002299 and 004232, or any other European site, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. This conclusion is based on a complete assessment of all aspects of the proposed project and there is no reasonable doubt as to the absence of adverse effects. Key considerations include:

- A full and detailed assessment of all aspects of the proposed project including proposed mitigation measures, as set out in the NIS, project documentation and CEMP,
- Conditions of the permission which can require monitoring of water quality, prior to during and post construction of the development, and
- Detailed assessment of likely in combination effects with other plans and projects in the area of the site and the pressures on the waterbodies in the area of the site.

8.0 Recommendation

8.1. I recommend that permission be granted for the reasons and considerations set out below and subject to the following conditions.

9.0 Reasons and Considerations

9.1. In coming to its decision, the Board had regard to:

- a. The governments Climate Action Plan 2024;

- b. The governments Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework;
- c. Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031;
- d. The Meath County Council Development Plan 2022-2027;
- e. The nature, scale, and extent of the proposed development;
- f. The characteristics of the site and surrounding area, including the separation distances between the proposed development and dwellings or other sensitive receptors;
- g. Documentation submitted with the proposed application;
- h. The submissions and observations from prescribed bodies and the planning authority;
- i. The planning history of the immediate area including the permitted solar farm development (PA ref. 21546, ABP-311760);
- j. The mitigation measures proposed for construction and operation;
- k. The report of the Inspector.

9.2. Appropriate Assessment – Stage 1

- 9.2.1. The Board completed an Appropriate Assessment screening exercise in relation to the potential effects of the proposed development on designated European Sites, taking into account the nature, scale and location of the proposed development, zoning of the site, the Screening for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement Report submitted with the application, the Inspector's report, and submissions on file. In completing the screening exercise, the Board adopted the report of the Inspector and concluded that, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, by itself or in combination with other development in the vicinity, the likelihood of significant effects on the following European sites could not be ruled out, River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA.

9.3. Appropriate Assessment – Stage 2

The Board considered the Natura Impact Statement and all other relevant submissions on the file and carried out an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposed development on the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA, in view of the sites' conservation

objectives. The Board considered that the information before it was adequate to allow the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment.

In completing the appropriate assessment, the Board considered, in particular, the following:

- a) the site-specific conservation objectives for the European site,
- b) the likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development both individually or in combination with other plans or projects, and in particular the risk of impacts on water quality on QI/SCI species,
- c) the mitigation measures which are included as part of the current proposal.

In completing the Appropriate Assessment, the Board accepted and adopted the Appropriate Assessment carried out in the Inspector's report in respect of the potential effects of the proposed development on the aforementioned European Sites, having regard to the site's conservation objectives.

In overall conclusion, the Board was satisfied that the proposed development, by itself or in combination with other plans or projects, would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites in view of their conservation objectives. This conclusion is based on a complete assessment of all aspects of the proposed project, including measures identified to control the volume and quality of surface water discharges which provide for the appropriate management of flows and interception of silt and other contaminants prior to discharge from the site during construction and operation, and there is no reasonable scientific doubt as to the absence of adverse effects.

9.4. Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

- 9.5. It is considered that subject to compliance with the conditions set out below the proposed development would be in accordance with European, national, regional and local planning and related policy, it would not have an unacceptable impact on the landscape, water quality, ecology or archaeology, it would not seriously injure the visual or residential amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity, and it would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

10.0 Conditions

1.	<p>The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development, or as otherwise stipulated by conditions hereunder, and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars. In default of agreement the matter(s) in dispute shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of clarity.</p>
2.	<p>The period during which the development hereby permitted may be carried out shall be 10 years from the date of this order.</p> <p>Reason: Having regard to the nature of the development, the Board considers it appropriate to specify a period of validity of this permission in excess of five years.</p>
3.	<p>Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall appoint a named Community Liaison Officer for all stages of the development, who shall be the first point of contact for residents and shall be responsible for discharging information in relation to the project to residents.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of residential amenity and orderly development.</p>
4.	<p>Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall submit to the planning authority for written agreement:</p> <p>(a) Details of the design option for the IPP building for written agreement with the planning authority, as shown in drawing no. 409-00 Sheet 1 and Sheet 2, IPP Control Building Plan and Elevations.</p>

	<p>(a) Details of all finishes of the lighting protection masts, buildings, roofing materials, fencing finishes, lighting poles etc. with external finishes to reflect the rural location, where possible.</p> <p>(b) Details of all CCTV cameras and private lighting to be installed within the substation site.</p> <p>(c) Demarcation of parking spaces to be provided for operational traffic in the IPP and Eir Grid compounds.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of clarity and visual amenity.</p>
5.	<p>Mitigation and monitoring measures outlined in the plans and particulars, including the NIS, EclA, CHIA, TTA and CEMP submitted with this application, shall be carried out in full. Prior to the commencement of development that applicant shall submit a schedule of all mitigation measures to the planning authority in a single document.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of protecting the environment and in the interest of public health.</p>
6.	<p>a) Existing field boundaries shall be retained.</p> <p>b) Biodiversity enhancement measures for the substation site (area under OHLs) shall be integrated with those for the permitted solar farm. Where wildflower meadows are to be established this shall be via natural revegetation or sourcing of seeds from the local area, for written agreement with the planning authority.</p> <p>c) Efficacy of biodiversity enhancement mitigation measures shall be demonstrated in annual monitoring reports.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of biodiversity.</p>
7.	<p>Site development and building works shall be carried out only between the hours of 0700 to 1900 Mondays to Fridays inclusive, between 0800 and 1400 hours on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and public holidays. Deviation from these times will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority.</p>

	Reason: In order to safeguard the residential amenities of property in the vicinity.
8.	<p>During construction, noise levels at noise sensitive locations shall not exceed 70dB(A) between 0700 to 1900 hours Monday to Friday and 0800 and 1400 hours on Saturdays and 45dB(A) at any other time. Noise exceedance activities shall be allowed in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority.</p> <p>Reason: In order to safeguard the residential amenities of property in the vicinity.</p>
9.	<p>The construction of the development shall be managed in accordance with a Construction and Environmental Management Plan which shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. The CEMP shall incorporate, but is not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Construction Stage Traffic Management Plan, to include all traffic and transport mitigation measures, timing and routing of construction traffic to and from the construction site, associated directional signage, arrangements for the delivery of abnormal loads to the site and arrangements for the coordinated management of construction traffic on the L2210 should the subject development be constructed concurrently with the permitted Derryclare Solar Farm, b) Invasive species management plan, c) Waste management plan, d) Measures to minimise noise and vibration, e) Measures to protect soils, ground and surface water and hedgerows, f) Arrangements for water quality monitoring and reporting to the PA, upstream and downstream of the substation site, prior to, during and post construction works, g) The appointment of a full-time, appropriately qualified environmental manager/Ecological Clerk of works for the duration of the construction and development phases of the project, and

	<p>h) Details on the location of all archaeological and cultural heritage constraints relevant to the proposed development, as set out in the CHIA and by any subsequent archaeological investigations associated with the project. This shall include an appropriate protective fencing around CH25 and means to protect townland boundaries. The CEMP shall clearly describe all identified likely archaeological impacts, and all mitigation measures to protect archaeological and cultural heritage during all phases of construction.</p> <p>i) No washing out of vehicles used in concrete transport or concreting operations shall be carried out on site.</p> <p>A record of daily checks that the construction works are being undertaken in accordance with the CEMP shall be kept at the construction site office for inspection by the planning authority. The agreed CEMP shall be implemented in full in the carrying out of the development</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of amenities, environmental protection and safety.</p>
10.	<p>(a) Water supply and drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works in respect of both the construction and operation phases of the proposed development.</p> <p>(b) All works in the vicinity of watercourses shall be in accordance with the recommendations in Inland Fisheries Ireland's Guidance Document on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and adjacent to Waters, 2016, and shall be referred to in the Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and shall be supervised by an Ecological Clerk of Works and Project Hydrologist.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and public health.</p>
11.	<p>(a) Prior to commencement of development Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment (UAIA) shall be commissioned, to include a desktop assessment that addresses the underwater cultural heritage</p>

	<p>of the proposed development area and a licenced dive/wade assessment, to the satisfaction of the NMS. No construction works shall commence until after the UAIA has been submitted to the NMS and reviewed.</p> <p>(b) The developer shall engage a suitably qualified archaeologist to monitor (licensed under the National Monuments Acts) all site clearance works, topsoil stripping, groundworks, dredging and/ or the implementation of agreed preservation in-situ measures associated with the development, as appropriate, following consultation with NMS. The use of appropriate machinery to ensure the preservation and recording of any surviving archaeological remains shall be necessary.</p> <p>Should archaeological remains be identified during the course of UAIA and/or archaeological monitoring, all works shall cease in the area of archaeological interest pending a decision of the planning authority, in consultation with the National Monuments Service, regarding appropriate mitigation, preservation in-situ and/or excavation. The developer shall facilitate the archaeologist in recording any remains identified. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified by the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments Service, shall be complied with by the developer. Following the completion of all archaeological work on site and any necessary post-excavation specialist analysis, the planning authority and the National Monuments Service shall be furnished with a final archaeological report describing the results of the monitoring and any subsequent required archaeological investigative work/excavation required. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the developer.</p> <p>Reason: To ensure the continued preservation (in situ or by record) of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest.</p>
12.	<p>Operational noise levels shall not exceed 55dB(A) $L_{eq\ 1hour}$ at the nearest noise sensitive locations between 0800 and 2000 hours (Monday to Friday inclusive) and shall not exceed 45dB(A) $L_{eq\ 1hour}$ at any other time.</p>

	Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.
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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.

Deirdre MacGabhann
Senior Planning Inspector

7th August 2024

Form 1
EIA Pre-Screening
[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	ABP-318759-23		
Proposed Development Summary	Proposed development of a 110kV substation and associated works.		
Development Address	Townland of Clonymeath, Summerhill, County Meath.		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	YES
		No	No further action required
2. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?			
Yes			EIA Mandatory EIAR required
No	NO	Class 20, Part 1 of Schedule 5 requires EIA for the construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometres. Class 3(b), Part 2, Schedule 5 requires EIA for industrial installations for the transmission of electrical energy by overhead cables, not included in Part 1, where the voltage would be 200kV or more. The development is for a 110kV substation with connection to the transmission system by the installation of a net, additional length of 110kV overhead line of c.111.6m (60m to be decommissioned, 171.6m to be provided). The proposed development does not include removal of field boundaries (Schedule 5, Part 2, Class 1(a)), or provision of any private road (Schedule 5, Part 2, Class 10(dd)).	Proceed to Q.3

3. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) but does not equal or exceed a relevant quantity, area or other limit specified [sub-threshold development]?

		Threshold	Comment (if relevant)	Conclusion
No		N/A		No EIAR or Preliminary Examination required
Yes	YES	<p>Class 20, Part 1 of Schedule 5 requires EIA for the construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometres.</p> <p>Class 3(b), Part 2, Schedule 5 requires EIA for industrial installations for the transmission of electrical energy by overhead cables, not included in Part 1, where the voltage would be 200kV or more.</p> <p>Class 15, Part 2, Schedule 5 requires EIA for Any project listed in this Part which does not exceed a quantity, area or other limit specified in this Part in respect of the relevant class of development, but which would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7.</p> <p>The proposed development operates at a voltage of 110kV and includes additional OHL of c.111.6m at a voltage of 110kV (60m to be decommissioned, 171.6m to be provided). I would consider this voltage to be significantly below the thresholds set out in Class 20, Part 1 (length and voltage) and below the threshold set out in Class 3(b), Part 2.</p>		Proceed to Q.4

		I consider therefore that the development comprises a sub-threshold development.		
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4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No		Preliminary Examination required
Yes	YES	Screening Determination required

EIA Screening Determination

A. CASE DETAILS		
ABP- 318759-23		
Development Summary	Proposed development of a 110kV Substation and associated works.	
	Yes / No / N/A	Comment (if relevant)
1. Was a Screening Determination carried out by the PA?	N/A	
2. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?	Yes	
3. Has an AA screening report or NIS been submitted?	YES	The application includes a Natura Impact Statement. The document includes an AA screening exercise.
5. Have any other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment which have a significant bearing on the project been carried out pursuant to other relevant Directives – for example SEA		<p>The application documents include a Flood Risk Assessment and assessment of effects on water quality, noise, cultural heritage, landscape, biodiversity and European sites.</p> <p>SEA and AA were undertaken in respect of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.</p>

EIA Screening Determination

B. EXAMINATION	Where relevant, briefly describe the characteristics of impacts (ie the nature and extent) and any Mitigation Measures proposed to avoid or prevent a significant effect (having regard to the probability, magnitude (including population size affected), complexity, duration, frequency, intensity, and reversibility of impact)	Is this likely to result in significant effects on the environment? Yes/ No/ Uncertain
1. Characteristics of proposed development (including demolition, construction, operation, or decommissioning)		
<p>1.1 Is the project significantly different in character or scale to the existing surrounding or environment?</p>	<p>The proposed development is situated to the northeast of, and c.1km removed from, the village of Summerhill. It is proposed in an agricultural field, in a lowland landscape dominated by improved tillage and grassland agriculture. Watercourses lie to the west and south of the site. Nearest dwellings are to the southeast and southwest, separated from the site by a substantial conifer plantation.</p> <p>The nature of the development differs from its agricultural context, however an existing 110kV OHL traverses the site and the development is not, therefore, exceptional in its context. In addition, permission has been granted for a solar farm to the north and east of the development site, which the substation will serve and to the east and west of this 'parent' permission. Access to the substation will be via an extension of the permitted internal track and relocated access, off the L2210, permitted to serve the solar farm.</p> <p>The proposed development site has a footprint of 2.4ha, a very modest land take in the rural environment. Vertical elements</p>	<p>No</p>

EIA Screening Determination

	are proposed, but due to topography and natural screening, the development will not be significantly visible from the public road network or nearby sensitive receptors.	
1.2 Will construction, operation, decommissioning or demolition works cause physical changes to the locality (topography, land use, waterbodies)?	There is no demolition work or decommissioning proposed. Construction and operation will give rise to changes in land use, with loss of improved agricultural land (of low local importance), changes in the noise environment, surface water flow paths and visual effects. Given the small footprint of the development, arrangements for the management of surface water (designed in and best construction practices), short term nature of construction noise, low level of operational noise, distance from sensitive receptors and topography/natural screening in the landscape, no significant environmental effects will arise. Cumulative effects with the adjoining solar farm are examined in the Inspectors report and given the characteristics of the landscape, where topography/hedgerows/treelines/banks and roadside development restrict views of the development site and intervisibility, no significant adverse cumulative effects will arise.	No
1.3 Will construction or operation of the project use natural resources such as land, soil, water, materials/minerals or energy, especially resources which are non-renewable or in short supply?	Construction materials will be typical for a development of this nature and scale (e.g. granular fill, electrical plant, fencing etc.). The loss of natural resources as a result of the type of development and its modest scale is not significant.	No
1.4 Will the project involve the use, storage, transport, handling or production of substance which would be harmful to human health or the environment?	Construction activities will involve the movement of soils, importation of inert materials, and use of plant and equipment, with the potential to harm the environment/human health because of contamination of surface water/emissions to air. All excavated	No

EIA Screening Determination

	<p>materials will be reinstated within the site and/or used for landscaping.</p> <p>Such effects would be typical for construction sites, with impacts both local and temporary in nature. With the implementation of the standard construction practice measures outlined in the CEMP, which includes a Construction Waste Management Plan, significant environmental effects are not likely.</p> <p>No operational impacts in this regard are anticipated.</p>	
<p>1.5 Will the project produce solid waste, release pollutants or any hazardous / toxic / noxious substances?</p>	<p>Construction work is likely to result in short term, increases in emissions from plant and equipment. However, given the small scale of the development, limited duration of works, effects will not be significant.</p> <p>Construction waste would typically include spare cables, concrete, overburden etc. These will be managed on site and disposed of in accordance with the waste management legislation as outlined in the Construction Waste Management Plan (in CEMP).</p> <p>Once constructed the substation will be remotely manned. Foul water will be removed from the site to licenced discharge facility.</p> <p>Significant environmental effects from the production of waste or pollutants are highly unlikely.</p>	No
<p>1.6 Will the project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?</p>	<p>Construction and operation have potential to give rise to contaminated surface water runoff and/or contamination of ground water (e.g. increased sedimentation, accidental spills). (No evidence of contaminated land was detected at the substation site).</p>	No

EIA Screening Determination

	<p>With the implementation of the standard construction practice measures outlined in the CEMP, significant effects are not likely.</p> <p>During operation, potentially contaminated surface waters will be directed through a hydrocarbon interceptor to be installed at the substation site and regularly inspected. Foul water will be removed from the site and discharged in an appropriate manner.</p>	
1.7 Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	<p>There is potential for construction activity to give rise to noise and vibration emissions. Such emissions will be localised and short term in nature, and their impacts would be suitably mitigated by the operation of standard measures listed in the Construction Environmental Management Plan.</p> <p>The operational substation will give rise to low level noise, which will not be discernible at nearest sensitive receptors. The substation and OHLs will be a source of extremely low frequency electromagnetic radiation, but this will be within ICNIRP guidelines for the protection of human health and distance from sensitive receptors.</p>	No
1.8 Will there be any risks to human health, for example due to water contamination or air pollution?	<p>Construction activity is likely to give rise to dust emissions and surface water runoff. Such construction impacts would be temporary and localised in nature and the application of standard measures within the Construction Environmental Management Plan would satisfactorily address potential risks on human health. No significant operational impacts are anticipated.</p>	No
1.9 Will there be any risk of major accidents that could affect human health or the environment?	<p>Having regard to the location of the development in a geographically stable zone and removed from nearest sensitive receptors (c.600m), and subject to compliance with appropriate operational standards (as overseen by</p>	No

EIA Screening Determination

	<p>EirGrid), there is no significant risk of major accidents that could affect human health.</p> <p>The issue of flood risk has been satisfactorily addressed in the submitted Stage 3 FRA.</p>	
<p>1.10 Will the project affect the social environment (population, employment)</p>	<p>The development is situated in a rural area, removed from nearest sensitive receptors. Short term effects may arise for traffic and transport/use of the public roads. Some positive local economic and employment benefits may arise. Given the modest scale of the development, intended phasing of the development such that it is not constructed concurrent with the adjoining solar farm, and subject to the standard best practice mitigation measures set out in the Traffic, Transport and Access Report, significant effects are not likely.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>1.11 Is the project part of a wider large-scale change that could result in cumulative effects on the environment?</p>	<p>The development will connect a permitted solar farm (PA ref. 21546/ABP-311760) to the transmission system. Other solar farms are situated adjoining the site and in the wider area of the site. Proposed and permitted solar farms do not amount to 'large scale change'. Whilst land take is substantial, it is very modest compared to the area of agricultural land in County Meath. Further, solar farm development allows some forms of agricultural land use to continue e.g. sheep farming. Other cumulative effects could arise from multiple solar farms in the area of the site. These are discussed below.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2. Location of proposed development</p>		

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<p>2.1 Is the proposed development located on, in, adjoining or have the potential to impact on any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) European site (SAC/ SPA/ pSAC/ pSPA) b) NHA/ pNHA c) Designated Nature Reserve d) Designated refuge for flora or fauna e) Place, site or feature of ecological interest, the preservation/conservation/ protection of which is an objective of a development plan/ LAP/ draft plan or variation of a plan 	<p>The development site is removed from national and European sites of nature conservation interest.</p> <p>However, there is hydrological connectivity to downstream sites. These have been considered in the Ecological Impact Assessment and NIS and, with the implementation of standard good construction practices, designed in measures (e.g. for management of surface water), the potential for significant effects has been ruled out.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2.2 Could any protected, important or sensitive species of flora or fauna which use areas on or around the site, for example: for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, over-wintering, or migration, be significantly affected by the project?</p>	<p>The development site comprises improved agricultural land. Sensitive and important species occur in the area of the site, but are not dependent on it for nesting, breeding, resting, over-wintering or migration. Some may forage on it, but will not be dependent on it, given the size of the agricultural land resource in the area and low land take from sub-station, solar farm and similar developments in the area. No proposed loss of hedgerows and water quality in waterbodies is protected by comprehensive mitigation measures. The proposed biodiversity enhancement measures have potential to improve the value of the habitat.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2.3 Are there any other features of landscape, historic, archaeological, or cultural importance that could be affected?</p>	<p>There are features of archaeological and cultural heritage interest in the area of the site. Effects on these are mitigated by the layout of the development (avoidance of known features) and proposed pre-development testing, with appropriate preservation if unidentified assets are found.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2.4 Are there any areas on/around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources which could be</p>	<p>Development site comprises improved agricultural farmland. Watercourses south, west and downstream of the site have Poor status (WFD). Development site is at least 10m from watercourses and standard best</p>	<p>No</p>

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affected by the project, for example: forestry, agriculture, water/coastal, fisheries, minerals?	practice measures during construction and the proposed surface water management system during operation will prevent any adverse effects on ground or surface water.	
2.5 Are there any water resources including surface waters, for example: rivers, lakes/ponds, coastal or groundwaters which could be affected by the project, particularly in terms of their volume and flood risk?	The development will implement SUDS measures to control surface water run-off. The development would not increase risk of flooding to downstream areas with surface water to discharge at greenfield runoff rates.	No
2.6 Is the location susceptible to subsidence, landslides or erosion?	No	No
2.7 Are there any key transport routes (e.g. National primary Roads) on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the project?	The site is served by a local road network. During construction there will be an increase in traffic on local roads particularly the L2210, however, effects will occur for a short section of the road and will be short term. There are no predicted significant effects on the national road network. Operational traffic is very modest with no potential for adverse effects.	No
2.8 Are there existing sensitive land uses or community facilities (such as hospitals, schools etc) which could be significantly affected by the project?	No.	No
3. Any other factors that should be considered which could lead to environmental impacts		
3.1 Cumulative Effects: Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in cumulative effects during the construction/ operation phase?	The development will connect a permitted solar farm (PA ref. 21546/ABP-311760) to the transmission system. Other solar farms are situated adjoining and in the wider area of the site. There is potential for cumulative effects on land take, landscape and visual amenity, the local road network, archaeology and water quality. Landscape, visual and water quality are considered above, and for the reasons stated are not considered to be significant.	No

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	<p>The potential for adverse effects on archaeology will be mitigated by the standard practice in development decisions with location of developments to avoid direct effects/effects on setting and pre-development testing in line with NMS requirements. Subject to the implementation of similar measures in this instance, there is no potential for significant cumulative effects on archaeology.</p> <p>Construction of substation will take place before construction of Clonmeath Solar Farm, such that there will be minimal overlap of traffic effects and will not be significant. Phasing the development and the potential for cumulative effects with other solar farms using the same local road to provide construction access (ABP-312723), can be addressed by condition.</p>	
3.2 Transboundary Effects: Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects?	No	No
3.3 Are there any other relevant considerations?	No	No
C. CONCLUSION		
No real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	Agreed	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Yes</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; margin-left: 10px;">EiAR Not Required</div>
Real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.		
D. MAIN REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS		

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Having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development, which is below the threshold in respect of Class 20, Part 1 of Schedule 5 and Class 3(b) of Part 2 to Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended,
- The location of the proposed on improved agricultural land and outside of any sensitive location specified in Article 109(4)(a)(v) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised,
- The guidance set out in the 'Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-threshold Development', issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2003),
- The criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised, and
- The features and measures proposed by the applicant that are envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise be significant effects on the environment, including measures identified to be provided as part of the project Construction and Environmental Management Plan, Geology and Hydrology Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment, Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Noise Report,

It is considered that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and that the preparation and submission of an environmental impact assessment report would not, therefore, be required.

Inspector _____

Date _____

Approved (DP/ADP) _____

Date _____