



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report ABP 319151-24

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<b>Development</b>	Proposed windfarm of 9 no. wind turbines and associated works
<b>Location</b>	Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands Co. Clare
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Clare County Council
<b>Prospective Applicant</b>	FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC
<b>Type of Application</b>	S37CC Pre-application Consultation on Design Flexibility.
<b>Date of S37CC Pre-Application Meeting:</b>	04/04/24
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	13/04/23
<b>Inspector</b>	Pauline Fitzpatrick

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1. This report relates to pre-application discussions held with FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC in respect of a proposed development known as Knockshanvo windfarm which is to comprise of 9 turbines and ancillary works including an on-site substation. The prospective applicant is seeking an Opinion on Flexibility from the Board. The request was received by the Board on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- 1.2. The Board's representatives met with the prospective applicant in relation to the proposed development under section 37B of the Planning and Development Act. The presentation provided by the prospective applicant and written record of the meeting are on the said file (ABP Ref. 319215-24). The Board's representatives also met with the prospective applicant on one occasion in relation to the requested Opinion on Flexibility. The presentation provided by the prospective applicant and the written record of this meeting are on this file.

## **2.0 Site Description**

- 2.1. The site which covers an approx. area of 931 hectares is located c. 3km to the south of Broadford, c. 3.5km southwest of Kilkishen and c. 4km northwest of Sixmilebridge in south Clare. It is accessed from the R465 regional road which travels in a north-south direction to the east of the site.
- 2.2. The site comprises of commercial coniferous forestry, biodiversity areas under Coillte management and 3<sup>rd</sup> party lands.
- 2.3. Land uses in the wider landscape comprise of commercial forestry and agriculture with one off housing along the local road network.

## **3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1. The proposed development will comprise the following:
  - 9 no. wind turbines each with a capacity of between 5.7MW and 7.2MW. It will have a MEC range of between 51.3MW and 64.8MW. The turbines are to have a blade tip height in the range of 179.5 to 185 metres, a hub height in

the range of 102.5 to 110.5 metres and rotor diameter in the range of 149 to 163 metres,

- 110kV substation,
- 1 no. 105 metre high meteorological mast,
- 5 no. borrow pits,
- 3 no. construction compound,
- Access roads both new and upgrade of existing,
- Temporary off-site staging area for turbine components,
- Recreation and amenity facilities,
- All ancillary works.

The connection to the national grid via an underground connection from the proposed onsite 110kV electrical substation to Ardnacrusha 110 kV substation will be subject of a separate Section 182A application (subject of pre-application consultations under ref. ABP 317763-23).

## **4.0 Request For An Opinion On Flexibility**

### **4.1. Context**

- 4.1.1. The prospective applicant previously entered into pre-application discussions with the Board under ABP 315797- 23 with respect to the development of the proposed Knockshanvo windfarm comprising of 9 no. wind turbines and ancillary works.
- 4.1.2. The Board in a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023 determined that the proposed development constitutes Strategic Infrastructure Development within the meaning of section 37A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and that any application should be made directly to the Board.
- 4.1.3. The Planning and Development, Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act 2022, provides for design flexibility in the case of applications for permission for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule, primarily relating to the rapidly changing technology available in renewables, and the potentially long lead-in times between the making of a planning application and procurement of equipment.

4.1.4. The request for a design flexibility opinion is required to be part of the consultations under section 37B. As a consequence, the prospective applicant has sought a new pre- application consultation (ABP 219215-24). Concurrently the prospective applicant has submitted this request to the Board for an Opinion on Flexibility with respect to specific elements of the development that may be provided later for the Board's approval.

### **Request**

4.1.5. Section 37CC material for formal consultation was submitted to the Board on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024, including prescribed Form 20 as set out in the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations 2023. The request included all relevant information as set out in Section 37CC (2) of the Act, in order to assist the Board in informing its opinion, including:

- Name and address of the applicant
- A site location map
- Description of the nature and purpose of the proposed development and its possible effects on the environment.
- A draft layout plan of the proposed development
- Details of the development which are considered unlikely to be confirmed at application stage and the need for flexibility for the following reasons:
  - Procurement
  - Potential obsolescence of existing technology
  - To allow the prospective applicant to take advantage of new technologies which may become available during the consenting process.

4.1.6. The following elements (details) of the development are those for which flexibility is being sought:

	<b>Minimum (metres)</b>	<b>Maximum (metres)</b>
<b>Turbine Tip Height</b>	179.5	185
<b>Rotor Diameter</b>	149	163

<b>Hub Height</b>	102.5	110.5
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- 4.1.7. At the meeting with Board representatives (detailed in Section 5 below) the prospective applicant confirmed the inclusion of the range in generating capacity arising from the above range of parameters. They are as follows:

	<b>Generating Capacity Minimum (MW)</b>	<b>Generating Capacity Maximum (MW)</b>
<b>Each turbine</b>	5.7	7.2
<b>Overall Windfarm</b>	51.3	64.8

## 5.0 Consultation

- 5.1. 1 no. meeting was held with the prospective applicant's representatives on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2024. The presentation to the meeting and the meeting record are on the file. Issues raised at the meeting are identified and considered in Section 9 below.

## 6.0 Legislative Provisions

### 6.1. Planning and Development, Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act 2022

This Act, in recognition that certain applications require a degree of flexibility, introduced amendments to the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, to facilitate procedures that will enable planning authorities and the Board to consider design flexibility as part of the assessment of planning applications.

### 6.2. Section 37CC Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)

This section of the Act sets out the requirements for requesting the Board to consider design flexibility, and the Board procedures for consideration of the request as part of the assessment of planning applications.

**Section 37CC (1)** states that a prospective applicant who proposes to make an application for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule may, before

making such an application, request a meeting with the Board for the purpose of section 37CD as part of consultations referred to in section 37B(1).

**Section 37CC(2) (a-d)** lists the details required in the application. (incl. site location map, draft layout plan, brief project description & possible effects on the environment).

**Section 37CC (2) (e)** requires a description of -

*(i) the details, or groups of details, of the proposed development that, owing to the circumstances set out in subparagraph (ii), are unlikely to be confirmed at the time of the proposed application, and*

*(ii) the circumstances relating to the proposed development, including such circumstances as the Minister may prescribe in relation to any class or description of development for the purposes of this subparagraph, that indicate that it is appropriate that the proposed application be made and decided, before the prospective applicant has confirmed the details referred to in subparagraph (i) including, in particular, whether the prospective applicant may be able to avail of technology available after making the proposed application that is more effective or more efficient than that available at the time of the application,*

**Section 37CC (2) (f)** requires an undertaking to provide with the proposed application either—

*(i) two or more options in respect of each detail or group of details referred to in paragraph (e)(i), containing information on the basis of which the proposed application may be made and decided,*

*(ii) parameters within which each detail or group of details referred to in paragraph (e)(i) will fall and on the basis of which the proposed application may be made or decided, or (iii) a combination of subparagraphs (i) and (ii),*

**Section 37CC (2) (g-h)** lists other information that may be provided or prescribed.

**Section 37CC (3)** provides for the Board to convene a meeting.

**Section 37CC (4)** provides for the Minister to make regulations in relation to procedures and administration for the purposes of holding a meeting.

### **6.3. Circular Letter PL11/2023 – New Design Flexibility Provisions with regard to certain unconfirmed details as part of application for planning permission**

This document refers to the opinion on flexibility which developers may wish to avail of. It notes that applicants may wish to seek permission before certain details of the proposed development are confirmed. It provides an example of a windfarm and notes that details such as the precise height or blade length of a turbine or the precise grid connection point and route may not be confirmed at the time of application. In addition, it notes that the process is not intended to apply to points of detail generally dealt with by way of compliance condition and agreed between the applicant and the Board post-consent.

The document states that the applicant must set out the circumstances why it would be appropriate for the proposed application to be made and decided before the details are confirmed. It provides that a separate meeting may take place to discuss the flexibility request as part of the existing pre-application arrangements. It also states that existing consultations which may take place in advance of the flexible meeting request may concern the scope of details not likely to be confirmed at application stage and likely to be subject to a request for an opinion on unconfirmed details.

It further provides for matters of public notification and transparency in respect of the new arrangements and prescribes the forms to be used for the various stages of the process - flexible meeting request (Form 19); opinion on unconfirmed details issued by the Board (Form 20); and supplementary statement of unconfirmed details to accompany a planning application (Form 21).

## **7.0 Planning History/Precedent Cases**

**ABP 318971-24** - an opinion on design flexibility is currently before the Board for decision. The proposed development is for 10 to 12 wind turbines and associated development in Co. Tipperary.

Several similar flexibility pre-application consultation requests under section 287A relating to maritime developments have been considered by the Board and are listed below.

- **ABP-316331-23:** The **Arklow Bank** offshore windfarm project
- **ABP-316332-23:** The **North Irish Sea Array** offshore windfarm project
- **ABP-318274-23:** The **Oriel** offshore windfarm project
- **ABP-318552-23:** The **Dublin Array** offshore windfarm project
- **ABP-318588-23:** The **Codling** offshore windfarm project

## 8.0 Assessment

- 8.1.1. The table below sets out the details and circumstances for section 37CC flexibility requested by the prospective applicant as well as my consideration and recommendation in relation to the various elements.

Details / Groups of Details	Circumstances	Consideration	Accept Flexibility
<b>Turbine Tip Height Range - 179.5 to 185 metres</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement process will not take place until the planning process is complete and pre-construction planning commences.</li> <li>• Potential for obsolescence of existing technology.</li> <li>• Take advantage of new technologies - New turbines models or variants may be available, due to advancements in technology.</li> </ul>	I am satisfied that the flexibility sought in tip height is reasonable and minimal and note that the height of the turbine is dependent on the final turbine design. Notwithstanding that the prospective applicant is not limited to the specific ranges detailed in the request, I am satisfied that the range of flexibility sought can be considered and assessed fully in any future application and EIAR.	Yes
<b>Rotor Diameter Range</b>		I am satisfied that the flexibility sought in rotor diameter is reasonable and	Yes



149 to 163 metres		minimal and note that rotor diameter is dependent on the final turbine design. Notwithstanding that the prospective applicant is not limited to the specific ranges detailed in the request, I am satisfied that the range of flexibility sought can be considered and assessed fully in any future application and EIAR.	
<b>Hub Height</b> Range 102.5 to 110.5 metres		I am satisfied that the flexibility sought in hub height is reasonable and minimal and note that hub height is dependent on the final turbine design. Notwithstanding that the prospective applicant is not limited to the specific ranges detailed, I am satisfied that the range of flexibility sought can be considered and assessed fully in any future application and EIAR.	Yes
<b>Export Capacity</b> Range Between 5.7MW and 7.2MW		Export capacity is dependent / consequent of turbine design and is not a physical attribute on which it is possible to measure or assess impact. It is accepted	No

		that there may be a variation in export capacity arising as a result differing turbine models. The stated range of capacity of between 5.7MW and 7.2 MW per turbine is noted.	
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## 9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1. Following the completion of the section 37CC meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2024, and having regard to the information provided by the prospective applicant in relation to the request for flexibility and to the circumstances which support this request, and based on my consideration of the request as set out above, I consider it reasonable that the following details/groups of details of the proposed development, may be confirmed after the proposed application has been made and decided by the Board:-

Turbine dimensions:

- a) Turbine Tip height
  - b) Rotor diameter
  - c) Hub Height
- 9.2. For each of the detail or group of details listed above, the prospective applicant shall provide with the proposed application two or more options in respect of each detail or group of detail and / or parameters within which each of the detail or group of details will fall.
- 9.3. Normal construction related details that are intrinsic to the installation of the windfarm infrastructure that are not clarified at the application stage should be set out and assessed in the application (incl. EIAR & NIS), and subject to a compliance condition which could include the submission of a CEMP.
- 9.4. The request for flexibility on export capacity was considered. Export capacity is dependent / consequent of turbine design and is not a physical attribute on which it

is possible to measure or assess impact. I accept that there may be a variation in export capacity arising as a result differing turbine models.

## 10.0 Recommendation

I recommend that the following details of the proposed development may be confirmed after the proposed application has been made and decided by the Board. The Board should notify the prospective applicant of its Opinion in respect of flexibility under section 37CD of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, in accordance with the following Draft Opinion.

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.



**Pauline Fitzpatrick**

**Senior Planning Inspector**

**10<sup>th</sup> May, 2024**

## DRAFT OPINION

### An Bord Pleanála Opinion on Flexibility

<b>(1) Request for meeting</b>	
<b>Request under section 37CC of the Act:</b>	Request for Design Flexibility in relation to a proposed windfarm at Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands, Co. Clare.
<b>Request reference Number:</b>	ABP 319151-24
<b>Name of the requestor/ prospective applicant:</b>	FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC
<b>Location, townland or postal address of the land or structure to which the application relates (as may be appropriate):</b>	Knockshanvo and adjacent townlands Co. Clare
<b>Nature and extent of the proposed development:</b>	Proposed 9 no. wind turbines each with a capacity of between 5.7MW and 7.2MW, including an on site substation and ancillary works
<b>Date of receipt of the request:</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> February 2024
<b>Opinion Reference Number:</b>	ABP 319215-24
<b>Date of Opinion:</b>	

**(2) Was the following Information included where relevant, with the Flexibility Meeting Request under section 37CC of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.**

Information	Enclosed with Request		
(a) A site location map sufficient to identify the maritime area/land on which the proposed development would be situated.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	
(b) A brief description of the nature and purpose of the proposed development and of its possible effects on the environment.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	
(c) A draft layout plan of the proposed development.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	
(d) A description of the details, or groups of details, of the proposed development that, owing to the circumstances set out in (e) below, are unlikely to be confirmed at the time of the proposed application.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	
(e) A description of the circumstances relating to the proposed development that indicate that it is appropriate that the proposed application be made and decided, before the prospective applicant has confirmed the details referred to in (d) above.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	
(f) An undertaking to provide with the proposed application, either -  i. two or more options, in respect of each detail or group of details referred to in (d) above containing information on the basis of which the proposed application may be made and decided,	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	

ii. parameters within which each detail referred to in paragraph (d) above will fall and on the basis of which the proposed application may be made and decided, or iii. a combination of (i) and (ii).			
(g) Such other information, drawings or representations as the prospective applicant may wish to provide or make available.	Yes: [ ]	No: [ ]	N/A: [ x ]
(h) The appropriate fee.	Yes: [ x ]	No: [ ]	

**(3) Opinion of the Board under section 287B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.**

Information	Details/ Circumstances
a) The details, or groups of details, of the proposed development that may be confirmed after the proposed application has been made and decided.	<p>1. Turbine Dimensions:</p> <p>a) Turbine Tip Height</p> <p>b) Rotor Diameter</p> <p>c) Hub height</p> <p>In deciding not to accept the request for flexibility for export capacity the Board considered that this element of the project relates is consequent of turbine design and is not a physical attribute on which it is possible to measure or assess impact. It is accepted that there may be a variation in export capacity arising as a result differing turbine models.</p>

<p>b) The circumstances relating to the proposed development that indicate that it is appropriate that the proposed application be made and decided before the prospective applicant has confirmed the details referred to in paragraph (a) above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. To avail of ongoing advances in technology;</li> <li>ii. To facilitate the procurement process;</li> <li>iii. To ensure against the potential obsolescence of existing technology.</li> </ul>
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**For each detail, or groups of details, referred to in paragraph 4(a) above, the proposed application shall, in addition to any other requirement imposed by or under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, be accompanied by the information referred to in the undertaking submitted with the flexibility meeting request under section, 37CC(2)(f) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.**

**The proposed application must be consistent with the opinion provided in accordance with section 37CD of the Act.**