



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-320362-24

Development	Transformer compound associated with the existing and proposed Google data centre
Location	Google data-centre facility, Profile Park, Grange Castle Business Park South, Aungierstown, Ballybane and Kilbride townlands, Dublin 22
Local Authority	South Dublin County Council
Type of Application	Pre-Application under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended
Prospective Applicant	Google Ireland Limited
Date of Site Inspection	18 th December 2024
Inspector	Colm McLoughlin

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Board received a request from Google Ireland Limited on the 29th day of July, 2024, to enter into pre-application consultations under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (hereinafter the Act of 2000), in relation to a development generally consisting of a proposed high-voltage, electrical-transformer compound and ancillary work associated with the Google data-centre facility at Grange Castle Business Park South in Dublin.
- 1.2. The primary purpose of the pre-application consultation is to address the issue of whether or not the proposed development constitutes strategic infrastructure for the purposes of the Act of 2000. If it is determined to be strategic infrastructure, a subsequent application for the proposed development would need to be made to the Board under section 182A of the Act of 2000, or if it is determined not to be strategic infrastructure, a subsequent application for the proposed development would need to be made to the Planning Authority under section 34 of the Act of 2000.
- 1.3. A pre-application consultation meeting was held with the prospective applicant on the 7th day of November 2024. A record of the meeting is contained on this file. Correspondence from the prospective applicant requesting closure of the consultation process was received by the Board on the 12th day of December, 2024.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. Grange Castle Business Park South is located on the western edge of Dublin city, approximately 13km from the city centre. It is accessed off the R134 regional road (Nangor Road) connecting between the Naas Road in Clondalkin and the Lock Road leading towards Newcastle to the southwest of the site. The site of the proposed electrical compound is situated off a recently constructed business park access road, known as Profile Park. The location for the proposed electrical compound consists of open undeveloped land, including hedgerows and trees. An existing EirGrid / ESB-operated 110kilovolt (kV) electrical substation, known as Barnakyle substation, is located adjoining to the west of the proposed compound area, and immediately to the west of Barnakyle substation is a Google Ireland Limited electrical compound that is understood to convey electricity to the existing data-centre facility operated by

the prospective applicant to the west and south of the proposed electrical compound area.

- 2.2. The wider business park complex is undergoing continued construction projects, including the provision of numerous associated electrical infrastructures interspersed amongst large warehouse and distribution type buildings. There are numerous temporary construction compounds in situ along Profile Park to the northeast of the subject site. The proposed electrical compound is located within the area subject of an appeal to the Board under An Bord Pleanála (ABP) reference (ref.) PL06S.320852, relating to a ten-year permission for expansion of the prospective applicant's data-storage facility.

3.0 Proposed Development

- 3.1. The proposed development comprises an electrical compound containing the following elements:
- installation of two transformers;
 - construction of a single-storey, control-room building with a gross floor area of approximately 119sq.m, accommodating two medium-voltage rooms and one low-voltage room;
 - electricity supplies connecting the proposed compound with the adjoining EirGrid / ESB substation;
 - security fencing featuring a double-gate access onto the southside;
 - a temporary construction access onto Profile Park.
- 3.2. According to the prospective applicant, the proposed electrical compound is required to facilitate the proposed expansion of the data centre that is currently subject of an appeal before the Board (ABP ref. PL06S.320852), and which is due for a decision in January 2025. The request is accompanied by a cover letter prepared by the prospective applicant's agent and several drawings stated to be from the application associated with the aforementioned appeal case (ABP ref. PL06S.320852).

4.0 Prospective Applicant's Case

- 4.1. Google Ireland Limited sought to enter pre-application consultation with An Bord Pleanála to affirm that the proposed development requires section 182A approval from An Bord Pleanála. The proposed compound would be located on lands in the ownership of the prospective applicant, which they state to have a land-use zoning within the South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028 referred to as 'Enterprise and Employment (EE)' with an objective to provide for enterprise and employment-related uses.
- 4.2. The provision of a 110kV under-the-fence electrical supply from the adjoining Barnakyle substation to the proposed electrical compound is stated by the prospective applicant to trigger the requirement for the project to be reviewed as strategic infrastructure under section 182A of the Act of 2000, as a high-voltage, electrical-supply cable comes within the definition of 'transmission' under subsection 182A(9) of the Act of 2000.

5.0 Relevant Precedents

5.1. Neighbouring Cases

- 5.1.1. There are extensive electrical infrastructures, including substations, in the immediate business park area, with the following 'section 182E' cases received by the Board of relevance:
- ABP ref. 320205 - in September 2024 the Board issued a determination to ESB, stating that a proposed extension to Grange Castle 110kV substation located approximately 1.5km to the northwest of the subject site is not a strategic infrastructure development (SID);
 - ABP ref. 311009 - in November 2021 the Board issued a determination to Vantage Data Centers DUB11 Limited, stating that a proposed 110kV gas-insulated switchgear substation, three transformer bays, two underground 110kV transmission lines and associated works serving a data-centre development permitted under SDCC ref. SD21A/0241 approximately 400m to the northeast of the subject site along Profile Park Road, is a SID;

- ABP ref. PL06S.VC0088 - in December 2015 the Board issued a determination to EirGrid Plc stating that a proposed 220kV / 110kV gas-insulated switchgear substation and associated works, including cabling, on a site to the northwest of the subject site, now known as Castlebaggot substation, is a SID.

5.2. Similar Cases

- 5.2.1. The following table sets out the most recent decisions by the Board relating to requests for pre-application consultations under section 182E of the Act of 2000 and whether or not the Board considered the subject proposals to come within the statutory definition of a SID:

ABP Ref.	Development Description	Decision Year	ABP Decision
320154	Proposed 220kV air-insulated switchgear, tail-fed substation, with associated grid connection comprising 220kV underground cabling connecting to the 220kV Knockraha substation in County Cork.	2024	Is a SID
320118	Synchronous condenser and associated 110kV underground electricity cabling and connection infrastructure to Buffy 110kV substation at Moycullen, County Galway	2024	Not SID
319735	Installation of a new 110kV / 38kV / MV distribution line on a 1.64ha site north of the Drogheda IDA Business and Tech Park in County Meath.	2024	Is a SID
313767	110kV substation at Coolderry, County Clare and associated 110kV underground cabling at Ardnacrusha 110kV substation.	2024	Is a SID
319140	C-type, air-insulated switchgear, 110kV substation and grid connection consisting of	2024	Is a SID

	underground cable looping with Derryiron – Timahoe 110kV circuit in Kildare.		
319395	Transformer compound enclosing a 110kV electricity transformer and an electrical-control building, and 30m of underground cables in Kilkenny.	2024	Not SID
319398	Transformer compound associated with the permitted Tuam Energy Park (Solar Farm) adjacent to the existing Cloon 110kV Substation, County Galway.	2024	Not SID
319153	110kV grid connection to facilitate connection of a windfarm to the national grid in County Mayo	2024	Is a SID
318208	110kV grid connection to facilitate connection of Shronowen windfarm in County Kerry to the national grid.	2024	Is a SID

6.0 Legislative Context

6.1. The Act of 2000

- 6.1.1. Section 2(1) of the Act of 2000 defines 'strategic infrastructure development' as including, inter alia, any proposed development referred to in section 182A(1) addressing electricity-transmission lines.
- 6.1.2. Under section 182A(1) of the Act of 2000, where a person (the 'undertaker') intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, the undertaker shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, an application for approval of the development under section 182B and shall apply to the Board for such approval accordingly.
- 6.1.3. Subsection 182A(9) of the Act of 2000 states that:
- 'transmission'**, in relation to electricity, shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 but, for the purposes of this

section, the foregoing expression, in relation to electricity, shall also be construed as meaning the transport of electricity by means of -

- (a) a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110 kilovolts or more, or
- (b) an interconnector, whether ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not.'

- 6.1.4. Subsection 182E(1) of the Act of 2000 provides that a prospective applicant who proposes to apply for approval under section 182B or 182D shall, before making the application, enter into consultations with the Board in relation to the proposed development.

6.2. **Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended**

- 6.2.1. As referred to in subsection 182A(9) of the Act of 2000, the following definition of electricity transmission, as well as other definitions arising from this, are set out in section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended:

'transmission'- 'in relation to electricity, means the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system in the State or offshore, or both, that is to say a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Board may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system but shall include any interconnector owned by the Board.'

'distribution' is defined as the transport of electricity by means of a distribution system, that is to say, a system which consists of electric lines, electric plant, transformers and switch gear and which is used for conveying electricity to final customers.'

'electric plant' – 'means any plant, apparatus or appliance used for, or for the purposes connected with, the generation, transmission, distribution or supply of electricity other than -

- (a) an electric line.

(b) a meter used for ascertaining the quantity of electricity supplied to any premises, or

(c) an electrical appliance under the control of a consumer.'

'electric line' – 'means any line which is used solely or amongst other things for carrying electricity for any purpose and as including -

(a) any support for any such line, that is to say, any structure, pole or other thing in, on, by, or from which any such line may be supported, carried or suspended,

(b) any apparatus connected to or associated with any such line for the purpose of carrying electricity or electronic communications services, and

(c) any wire, cable, tube, pipe or similar thing (including its casing or coating) which is used for the purpose of carrying electricity or electronic communications services and which surrounds or supports or is surrounded or supported by, or is installed in close proximity to, or is supported, carried or suspended in association with, any such line.'

6.3. **European Communities (Internal Market in Electricity and Gas) (Consumer Protection) Regulations of 2011 (S.I. No. 463 of 2011)**

6.3.1. As referred to in section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, the following is stated as a final customer in relation to electricity:

'final customer' means— (a) in relation to natural gas, a customer purchasing natural gas for his or her own use, and

(b) in relation to electricity, a person being supplied with electricity at a single premises for consumption on those premises.

7.0 **Consultation Meeting**

7.1.1. A pre-application consultation meeting regarding the subject proposed electrical-compound development was held between representatives of the Board and the prospective applicant on the 7th day of November, 2024. The meeting record relating

to this development proposal and the presentation made by the applicant to the Board's representatives are attached to the file.

8.0 Assessment

- 8.1.1. The proposed development comprises a 110kV electrical transformer compound, which is to connect via electrical cables to the adjacent EirGrid / ESB-operated Barnakyle 110kV electrical substation, which forms part of the national electricity-transmission system. The electrical facility would take power from the Barnakyle 110kV substation for use by the prospective applicant in their adjacent data-centre facility, including the proposed data-centre development currently before the Board (ABP ref. PL06S.320852). The prospective applicant asserts that the proposed 110kV high-voltage cables connecting from the existing substation into the proposed transformer compound would entail development coming within the definition of electricity transmission under the Act of 2000.
- 8.1.2. Subsection 182A(9) of the Act of 2000 states that 'transmission' shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, but for the purposes of this section, shall also be construed as meaning the transport of electricity by means of a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110kV or more.
- 8.1.3. Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended defines 'transmission' as 'the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system in the State or offshore, or both, that is to say a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Board may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system'. Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, states that the 'Board' in this legislative context is the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and the 'Commission' refers to the Commission for Energy Regulation, now known as the Commission for Regulation of Utilities.

- 8.1.4. From the outset, it is clear that the interpretation of electrical 'transmission' in the Act of 2000 is broader than the interpretation contained in the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, which provides a greater degree of criteria for a development to be categorised as being part of the electricity transmission system. According to the prospective applicant, the two proposed underground, electrical-feeder cables would feature capacity to convey voltages of 110kV, and, as such could reasonably be considered to allow for the transport of electricity by means of high-voltage lines. However, I am satisfied that given the use of the word 'also' in the interpretation of 'transmission' within subsection 182A(9) of the Act of 2000, it is also essential to consider the interpretation of 'transmission' in the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended.
- 8.1.5. I do not consider the electricity transmission definition provided in the Act of 2000, as negating the need to consider the definition for same in the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, particularly given the Board's previous references to both definitions of electricity transmission when determining section 182E cases. Accordingly, to comprehensively assess this matter, it is essential that both definitions are considered in attempting to come to a robust, comprehensive conclusion.
- 8.1.6. In my opinion, for the transport of electricity to come within with the definition of 'transmission', as set out in the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, it is essential that this occurs by means of a transmission system fulfilling each of the following four criteria:
- 1) in the State or offshore, or both;
 - 2) wholly or mainly consisting of high-voltage lines and electric plant;
 - 3) used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another, from one substation to or from any interconnector, or from one substation to final customers;
 - 4) not including any such lines, specified by the ESB following approval by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, as being part of the distribution system, excluding any interconnector owned by the ESB.

- 8.1.7. The transport of electricity from the Barnakyle substation into the subject proposed transformer compound would clearly occur within the State in compliance with criteria 1 above.
- 8.1.8. During pre-application discussions it was advised by the prospective applicant that two underground 110kV feeders would extend from the existing substation to the adjoining proposed compound area, which would primarily contain two 120 megavolt-amperes (MVA) transformers and a switchgear building containing medium and low-voltage rooms. Details on the file do not specifically refer to the transformers as operating at 110kV or more, as the reference to 120MVA is with respect to the apparent power of the transformers, as opposed to their electrical potential measured in kV. Notwithstanding this, my understanding is that there is scope for 120MVA transformers to operate at 110kV. The proposed development would facilitate the conveying of electricity from the proposed transformers by stepping down the voltage of the electrical supply to a lower voltage to power the prospective applicant's data-centre facility. The control-room building and the lines conveying electricity to the prospective applicant's facility, would operate at medium to low voltage and not at high voltage. I accept that the proposals would feature two high-voltage cables entering the proposed compound feeding two transformers with potential to be high voltage, however, the entire electric lines and electric plant within the compound would not wholly feature high voltage and based on my understanding of this type of electrical facility, it would mainly provide a means of conveying electricity at a down-rated power within the compound via low to medium-voltage lines and electric plant to supply power to the end user. Accordingly, the proposed development would not mainly consist of high-voltage lines and electric plant, therefore, it fails to meet the interpretation of transmission detailed in criteria 2 above.
- 8.1.9. I am satisfied that the proposed means of conveying electricity would be from a substation, Barnakyle, to a final customer, the prospective applicant, therefore, the proposed development meets the interpretation of transmission in criteria 3 above.
- 8.1.10. I am not aware of any legislative provisions setting out that, following approval by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, the type of electrical lines proposed in this case have been specified by the ESB as being part of the distribution system. Information available to the public, including from organisations such as the ESB

(see <https://www.esbnetworks.ie/who-we-are/our-network> - accessed 19th day of December, 2024), would suggest that the subject compound forms part of the electrical distribution network, as opposed to the electrical transmission network, given that it would not alter the function of the existing substation and it would not form a new substation on the national electricity-transmission grid. Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, defines electricity 'distribution' as 'the transport of electricity by means of a distribution system, that is to say, a system which consists of electric lines, electric plant, transformers and switch gear and which is used for conveying electricity to final customers'. Based on the information provided, as well as the fact that the voltage of the system is not a qualifying criteria in the stated definition of a distribution system, it could reasonably be asserted that the proposed electrical compound would form part of the electrical distribution system. If the transport of electricity to a final customer is considered to form part of the electricity-distribution system, conversely it would not form part of the electricity-transmission system. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the proposed development would fail to meet the interpretation of transmission detailed in criteria 4 above.

- 8.1.11. In conclusion, the proposal does not meet the definition of electricity transmission under section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as it falls into the interpretation of a proposed development on the electricity-distribution system and as it does not wholly or mainly comprise of high-voltage lines and electric plant, and, accordingly, it would not fall into the interpretation of electrical-transmission under section 182A(9) of the Act of 2000. In these circumstances, I recommend that the Board issue a determination that the proposed development does not fall within the scope of section 182A(9) of the Act of 2000, and that a planning application should be made to South Dublin County Council, in the first instance. A list of prescribed bodies with respect to this prospective planning application is set out in Appendix A of this report.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. I recommend that the prospective applicant, Google Ireland Limited, be informed that the proposed development consisting of an electrical-transformer compound and associated development at Google data-centre facility, Profile Park, Grange Castle Business Park South, Aungierstown, Ballybane and Kilbride townlands, Dublin 22, to

connect to Barnakyle 110kV electrical substation, as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála, does not fall within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and that a planning application should be made in the first instance to South Dublin County Council.

- 9.2. 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.



Colm McLoughlin
Senior Planning Inspector

15th January 2025

Appendices

Appendix A. Prescribed Bodies

The following is a list of prescribed bodies considered relevant by the Board for the purposes of a prospective planning application in this case:

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage;
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications;
- Minister for Defence;
- An Taisce;
- Irish Aviation Authority;
- Uisce Éireann;
- Health Service Executive;
- Commission for the Regulation of Utilities;
- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Inland Fisheries Ireland;
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon;
- Fáilte Ireland;
- The Heritage Council.

Further notifications should also be made, where deemed appropriate.