



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-320819-24

Development	10 Year Permission for a PV farm on a site of 10.5 hectares
Location	Clonbanin West, Mallow, Co. Cork
Planning Authority	Cork Count Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	235719
Applicant	Clonbannin Solar
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Grant with conditions
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellants	Nora & Michael O'Connell
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	20 th November 2025
Inspector	Philip Davis

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Appendix 1:

Form 1: Pre-Screening Form

Appendix 2

AA Screening Determination

Appendix 3

Water Framework Directive

1. Introduction

This appeal is by local residents against the decision of the planning authority to grant permission for a solar farm on just over 10 hectares of land in north-west County Cork. The grounds of appeal relate to amenity and related issues.

The application was screened for EIA and AA and it was concluded by the planning authority that neither an EIAR nor an NIS was required.

2. Site Location and Description

2.1 Cloonbannin West, Co. Cork

The townland of Cloonbannin West is located in west Cork on the N72 between the towns of Mallow and Rathdrum. The townland is approximately 2km south of the village of Boherboe (sometimes spelled Boherboy) and 1km north of the smaller settlement of Dernagree. The landscape is characterised by large open fields in pasture use with some conifer plantations, with the topography undulating generally between the 140 to 170 metres contour. The N72 at this section largely follows the northern side of a wide valley, with the townland on a gentle south facing slope, providing wide views over the River Blackwater valley to the south. At this point, the N72 is a relatively narrow single lane national secondary road lacking a hard shoulder or footpath. A country road runs north from the N72 at Cloonbannin connecting with Boherboe. The area is relatively sparsely settled with scattered houses along both the N72 and minor roads and larger farmsteads usually accessed via farm tracks. There are mature conifer plantations on some areas of high ground, but most land in the area is in pasture, in small to mid-sized fields bounded by high hedges and treelines.

2.2 Appeal site

The appeal site is a farm of some 10.4 hectares on the northern side of the N72 on grazing land which rises gently to the north. It is connected to the L1011 country road to the east via a track which runs through a farmyard. This farmyard includes a

substantial 2 storey (apparently early 19th Century) farmhouse currently under reconstruction - the site does not include the farmhouse or farm buildings – the access track runs through the yard. The land rises roughly 15 metres in elevation from the roadside to the northern boundary. The site consists of three large roughly rectangular fields, with the visible remains of further field boundaries in addition to the access track. There is one unused gate to the N72 at its southern boundary. The field boundaries within the site consists of ditches and drains with hedgerows. The boundary of the site is marked by similar deep ditches (mostly dry, but with some visible flowing water) and hedges. North of the site, on rising ground, is further grazing land. Approximately 150 metres north is a substantial farmhouse overlooking the site and valley, with the remains of a graveyard and a ringfort next to the house. The village of Boherbue is some 3.5 km north and not visible from the site.

West of the site is another similar field, with conifer plantation beyond this. At the northwestern corner of the site there is a single dwelling, at its closest around 30 metres from the site. To the south is a thin strip of farmland/garden, and the N72, with a dwelling opposite. There is another bungalow dwelling on the south-eastern corner of the site, also fronting the N72.

To the east of the main part of the site is the farmhouse and agricultural buildings associated with the landholding (currently unoccupied, but with a rear extension under construction). This leads via a farm track to the L1011 Newmarket Road. There are a number of dwellings along this road as it turns uphill north from its junction with the N72. Approximately 90 metres north of the junction of the farm access there is an ESB substation on a prominent raised site.

3. Proposed Development

The proposed development consists of a 10 year permission for a PV farm consisting of approximately 9,464 photovoltaic panels on ground mounted frames with 16 no. string inverters within a site area of 10.4764 hectares, with 1 no. single storey transformer station, 1 no. single storey spare parts storage container, and 1 no. delivery station. The application includes for the upgrading of the existing

agricultural entrance onto the L1101, internal access tracks, security fencing, CCTV, landscaping, and associated works.

The planning application was submitted with a Planning Statement, a Glint and Glare Technical Report, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (including photomontages), an Ecological Impact Assessment, AA Screening Report, CEMP Drainage Strategy, Archaeological Impact Assessment, and Site Restoration Plan, along with detailed plans and specifications. A number of alterations and addendum reports were submitted following a further information request – these include a Geophysical Report, further ecological reports, a noise report, and a traffic impact assessment.

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4. Planning Authority Decision

4.1 Decision

The planning authority decided to grant permission subject to 48 no. generally standard conditions – one condition (no.4) specifies the removal of some PV panels at the southwestern corner.

3.2 Planning Authority Reports

There are 2 Planner's reports on file which inform the decision and which are summarised as follows:

1. 1st Planner's Report
2. Outlines planning policy and notes five submissions objecting to the proposed development, all from local residents.
3. Notes internal consultees recommending a request for additional information on noise emissions and on water impacts.
4. Requirement for Traffic Impact Assessment.

5. Notes that the ecology section considers the conclusion of the AA screening report to be satisfactory (No NIS required). Hedgerow management plan requested.
6. No EIA required.
7. The site is not within an area identified as being of risk of flooding.
8. Additional information required on the Landscape and Visual Assessment submitted.
9. The conclusions of the Glint and Glare report submitted are accepted, but concern noted regarding the visual impact at the southwestern corner of the lands near the N72. Some amendments to the report requested.
10. Following the first report, a further information request was issued for information on biodiversity, drainage, boundary drainage issues, noise, the LVIA and Glint and Glare reports, with associated alterations to the plans submitted.

11. Planner's 2nd Report

The second report addressed alterations to the proposed development including a Bird Survey Report, a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan, an Ecologically Friendly Hedgerow Management Plan, a Culvert Installation Method Statement, a noise report, a Traffic Impact Assessment and a Stage 1 & 2 Road Safety Audit.

- Noted that no external reports submitted following the revised submission.
- It was not considered that the revised details altered the conclusion of the AA Screening nor EIA Screening – No NIS or EIAR required.
- Concludes that all additional ecological information submitted is considered acceptable.
- The revised access detail is noted, with a few residual issues which have considered can be addressed by way of condition.
- Revised drawings in addition to revisions to the LVIA and the Glint and Glare assessment are considered acceptable.
- Additional plans clarifying design details are considered acceptable.

- Noted that the operational period for the farm is given as 40 years.
- An additional noise report on operational noise levels was considered acceptable by the Environment Department.
- A development contribution of €1,149.09 was required.
- Recommendation for permission with 48 no. conditions.

4.2 Other Technical Reports – XXXX County Council Internal Departments

Area Engineer: Further information sought on the access.

Water Services: No comments.

Ecology: Further information sought.

Archaeology: Report outlines issues – standard condition can address impacts.

Environment: No objection subject to condition – additional information sought on noise. An additional report submitted was considered acceptable.

4.3 Prescribed Bodies

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

No objection.

4.4 Third Party Observations

Five submissions were made to the planning application, all objecting for reasons including amenity, property devaluation, glint and glare, noise, general intrusion, impact on drainage, health impacts.

5. Planning History

5.1 Subject Site

21/5624: Permission granted to demolish part of the existing house and to extend at ground floor (dwelling on access track).

13/4530: Permission for retention of agricultural slatted unit.

19/6641: Permission for 20 metres high monopole at the substation north-east of the site.

5.2 Grid Connection and Infrastructure

There is an existing transformer station next to the site entrance – no details are provided as to its planning history. It is intended as part of the application to connect to this transformer.

5.3 Other Relevant Developments within the vicinity

20/5312: Refusal for forest road access from N72 from lands west of the site.

Appealed to the Board, but appeal invalidated (ABP-308165-20).

A number of solar farms have been permitted in the area, including **17/4308** (2km to the west) and **22/6224** (10km to the northeast).

6. Policy Context

6.1 National Policy and Legislation

5.1.1 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015, as amended.

The Act commits Ireland to the objective of becoming a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, reducing emissions by 51% by the end of the decade. Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, 2021 amends the principle act such that Section 15(1) requires:

“(1) A relevant body shall, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner consistent with—

- a) the most recent approved climate action plan,*
- b) the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy,*
- c) the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans,*
- d) the furtherance of the national climate objective, and*

e) the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State”.

“Relevant body” means a prescribed body or a public body.

6.1.2 Climate Action Plan 2025

Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015, as amended, Irelands national climate objective requires the State to transition to a resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy by no later than the end of 2050. This national climate objective meets Irelands obligations under EU and international treaties, including the Paris Agreement (2015), the European Green Deal and the EU’s objective to reduce GHG emissions by at least 51% by 2030 (compared to 2018) and achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

To meet its targets and obligations CAP 24 sets a course for Ireland to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net-zero no later than 2050. In terms of the electricity sector a 75% reduction in emissions based on 2018 levels is required by 2030 and CAP 24 provides that central to achieving this is the strategic increase in the share of renewable electricity to 80% by 2030 including ambitious targets of deploying 9GW of onshore wind, 8GW of solar power and at least 5GW from offshore wind projects. CAP 2025 was published on 15th April, 2025. It re-affirms the previous commitment to increase the share of renewable electricity generation to 50% by 2025 and 80% by 2030 including solar targets of up to 5GWs by 2025 and 8 GWs by 2030.

6.1.3 Ireland’s Long-term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions 2024

The National long-term Climate Action Strategy, entitled Ireland’s Long-term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions 2024, sets out indicative pathways, beyond 2030, towards achieving carbon neutrality for Ireland by 2050. The Strategy provides a pathway to a whole-of-society transformation and serves as a vital link

between shorter-term Climate Action Plans and Carbon Budgets and the longer-term objective of the European Climate Law and Ireland's National Climate Objective.

6.1.4 The National Adaptation Framework; Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland (June 2024)

The most recent approved national adaptation framework, the National Adaptation Framework; Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland June 2024 (NAF) is Ireland's second statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) and was published on 5th of June 2024. The NAF and its successors do not identify specific locations or propose adaptation measures or projects in individual sectors, but sets out the context to ensure local authorities, regions and key sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making. The NAF identifies 13 (previously 12) priority sectors under 7 lead Departments that are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans under the Climate Act in accordance with the Sectoral Planning Guidelines for Climate Change Adaptation which were published in 2018 and updated in 2024. The original 12 sectoral Plans prepared in 2019 and a new sectoral Plan for tourism are to be updated/prepared by end of Q3 2025. The following Electricity and Gas Sectoral Plan is relevant to the subject proposal.

6.1.5 Electricity and Gas Sectoral Plan 2019

The aim of the Plan is to address the risks posed by climate change to the electricity and gas networks. The plan focuses on identifying vulnerabilities such as extreme weather and changing temperature patterns and how they could affect the electricity and gas networks. Specific measures to minimise the potential negative effects of climate change are outlined including the strengthening of the grid and ensuring reliable gas supply. The Plan also seeks to exploit opportunities and the potential benefits arising from climate change adaptation such as increased energy efficiency and the development of new renewable energy sources.

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (“NPF”), First Revision of the NPF and the National Development Plan (“NDP 2018-2027)

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The NPF and the NDP combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The NPF sets out to deliver a spatial strategy through a set of National Strategic Outcomes (“NSO’s”), including: ‘Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society’ which establishes a national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The first revision of the NPF has been approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas, following the decision of the Government to approve the final revised NPF on 8th April, 2025. The ‘First Revision’ introduces regional renewable electricity capacity allocations for each of the three Regional Assemblies to be achieved by 2030 which for the Eastern and Midland Regional Area is an additional 3,294MW, for solar PV or 45% of the National share in 2030. This is the minimum required for solar generation to meet the 2030 emission reductions in the electricity sector. The NDP 2018-2027 sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework, through a total investment of approx. €116 billion. It recognises that Ireland’s energy system requires radical transformation in order to achieve its 2030 and 2050 targets and objectives. It recognises that investment in renewable energy sources affords Ireland an opportunity to decarbonise our energy generation, but that this must be complemented by wider measures to moderate growth in energy demand, increase energy security, diversify supply sources and facilitate more variable electricity generation on the grid

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6.1.7 National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030 (NBAP)

Ireland’s 4th NBAP sets the biodiversity agenda for the period 2023 – 2030. The NBAP has a list of Objectives which promotes biodiversity as follows, Objective 1 Adopt a whole of government, whole of society approach to biodiversity; Objective 2 Meet urgent conservation and restoration needs; Objective 3 Secure nature’s contribution to people; Objective 4 Enhance the evidence base for action on biodiversity; Objective 5 Strengthen Ireland’s contribution to international biodiversity initiatives.

6.1.8 National Energy Security Framework (April 2022)

The Framework addresses Ireland's energy security needs in the context of the war in Ukraine. It coordinates energy security work across the electricity, gas and oil sectors. The Framework takes account of the need to decarbonise society and the economy, and of targets set out in the Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions. Theme 3 - Reducing our Dependency on Imported Fossil Fuels, focusses on three areas of work:

7.1 Reducing demand for fossil fuels.

7.2 Replacing fossil fuels with renewables, including solar energy.

7.3 Diversifying fossil fuel supplies.

Under 7.2, the statement notes that prioritising renewables is in line with the requirements of the recast Renewable Energy Directive and the EC REPowerEU action statement. The Commission has called on Member States to ensure that renewable energy generation projects are considered to be in the overriding public interest, and the interest of public safety, and the Government supports this request.

6.2 Regional Planning Policy

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region 2020-2032

Sets out an integrated policy to enable the creation of sustainable regions with the capability to be resilient to future climate change. The Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) contained in the RSES are designed to promote efficiencies in water and energy use and the move towards a low carbon economy. **RPO 50** states that it is an objective to develop a diverse base of agricultural uses, including renewable energy. Policies to support renewable energy and its use and associated infrastructure are set out in **RPO 95, RPO 96, RPO 97, RPO 98 and RPO 221**, although there is no specific policy for solar farms. All such policies are stated to be in line with the NPF, the NDP and the Climate Action Plan.

6.2 Local Planning Policy - Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

The site is in open countryside in an area designated as a 'strong' rural area for housing. There are no designated scenic routes or landscape protection designations in the area. There are no specific policies relating to solar power, but general policies outlining support for renewable energy within the context of EU, National and Regional legislation and policy.

6.3 Natural Heritage Designations

The site is within the catchment of the River Blackwater, which is a designated SAC – site code 002170.

7. The Appeal

7.1 Grounds of Appeal

The decision has been appealed by Nora & Michael O'Connell of Clonbanin West. Key points of their appeal are as follows:

- Their property is 63 metres from the proposed development – it is argued that there should be at least a 500 metres separation of solar farms from dwellings.
- It is argued that it will devalue their house.
- Concerns raised about the impact on glint and glare on their house and it is argued that the report submitted is inadequate.
- Concerns raised about noise emissions from inverters.
- Issue of possible health risks raised.
- Concerns raised about power surges and electromagnetic interference.
- Concerns raised about a loss of privacy from the CCTV cameras.

7.2 Applicant Response

The applicants submitted a response with additional technical details which addressed the individual points. I would summarise the response as follows:

- With regard to impacts on their property, it is noted that following the FI (further information) request from Cork County Council there were revisions to the development which increases the distance of the closest PV panel to the elevation of the appellants dwelling to 78.5 metres. It is claimed that other solar farms in Cork (195706/17724) have lesser separations without any reported issues.
- The applicant refers to the FI response letter dated May 2024 with regard to glint and glare. It is acknowledged that some glare was identified for viewpoint VP4 – mitigation planting is proposed for this viewpoint, and it is submitted that this will reduce any impact to ‘negligible and imperceptible.
- In other response, it is noted that condition 4 of the permission set a requirement for an amended Glint and Glare Report prior to works – it is stated to be the intention that a revised glint and glare report will be prepared as requested.
- The acoustic report dated 17th July 2024 is referred to (Attached in the appendix to the letter), argues that any noise from inverters will be minor and well within WHO criteria.
- It is noted with regard to privacy and CCTV that there was an amendment to the positioning of the CCTV cameras proposed – it is submitted that due to the layout and separation distances, there is no impact on privacy for the appellant or any other dwellings in the vicinity.
- The CEMP is referred to (attached in the appendix to the letter) with regard to general pollution and construction impacts.

7.3 Planning Authority Response

The planning authority responded stating that they had no further comments on the appeal.

7.3 Further Responses

Nora and Michael O'Connor

- Attaches a letter sent by a family member of the landowner with regard to the appeal.
- It is restated that the application and proposed development is having a serious impact on local residents.

8. Assessment

Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including all of the observations and submissions received in relation to the appeal, and inspected the site, and having regard to relevant local/regional/national policies and guidance, I consider that the substantive issues in this appeal to be considered are as follows:

- Principle of development
- Landscape and visual impacts
- Glint & Glare Assessment
- Noise Assessment
- Residential amenity, health and property values
- Biodiversity
- Cultural heritage
- Construction and traffic impacts
- Hydrology Appraisal/Flood Risk Assessment (WFD)
- Decommissioning/Restoration Plan
- Duration of the Planning Application

Principle of development

The overall policy context for renewable energy (including solar power) and associated infrastructure is set by EU targets for renewables (**Directive 2018/2001/EU**) and related plans and guidance including the **REPowerEU Plan**

from 2022 and the **Energy Roadmap 2050**. Irish national policy is set within the **National Planning Framework**, the **National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030**, the White Paper ‘**Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030**’, the **National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030**, the **National Renewable Energy Action Plan** (on foot of **Directive 2009/28/EC**) and the **Climate Action Plan 2025**. The latter sets clear statutory requirements for developing low carbon energy.

The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) 2020-2032 sets out policies that generally favour the facilitation of renewable energy proposals and associated electrical infrastructure subject to the relevant environmental and planning criteria – Policy RPO-219 and related policies RPO 221, RPO 222 and RPO 224).

The site is located on rural agricultural land without a specific development zoning designation. General policy on renewable energy is set out in Chapter 13 of the **Cork County Development Plan (CCDP)** 2022-2028. Policy objectives ET 13-2 generally set out a favourable policy environment for solar farms within the context of national policy, subject to related policies on ecology, landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, rural development, flooding, and other planning and environment constraints these are set out in more detail in section 13-8 of the CCDP.

There is no relevant planning history for the site, but a significant number of solar farms permissions have been granted within Cork County, both by the planning authority and on appeal. It is noted by the appellant that several have been refused – these have usually been for site specific reasons.

I would conclude from the above that the overall principle of a solar development on these lands is to be viewed favourably from the perspective of national, regional and local policy and guidance, subject to the overall principles of proper planning and sustainable development, other statutory requirements, and the specific requirements for such developments set out in policy objective ET-13 of the CCDP.

Landscape and visual impacts

The applicant submitted a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the proposed development (with some amendments subsequent to the further information request) along with visualizations/photomontages.

The overall landscape is rural in nature, characterised by lush vegetation in a mixture of pasture and occasional conifer plantation, with an undulating topography falling generally to the south down to the broad Blackwater River valley, some 5 km from the site. The Cork County (draft Landscape Strategy) from 2007 characterises the landscape as LCT11:

Located between upland and lowland areas... characterised by its relative unevenness of terrain across the broad shallow valley of the River Blackwater.

It is classified as having a high landscape value, high landscape sensitivity and of a 'local' landscape importance. The area does not have a specific protective designation in the current development plan and there are no designated views or scenic routes within the visual envelope of the site. The area does not have any specific major tourist attractions and there are no designated walks or cycle routes within 5km.

Figures 1-6 and 1-7 of the LVIA set out the standard ZTV mapping indicating potential viewpoints without vegetation. The topography generally restricts views towards the site from the north and from west and west, with clearer views from areas to the south. A minor country road at Skagh, around 1km north of the site, provides potential views over towards the site, and the burial ground at Skagh is elevated above the proposed solar farm, at around 2-300 metres distant. This elevated site is in private lands and not easily accessible – the access is via private road.

The LVIA identifies 6 no. locations considered sensitive (indicated as VP1 to VP6 in Figure 1.8). I consider the chosen locations to be reasonable, and the photomontages appear to be accurate representation of the likely impacts. While the topography would indicate clear views, heavy vegetation in the area in reality prevents many clear views towards the area proposed for solar panels. The LVIA concludes that the landscape impact is medium-low within the immediate vicinity (within 500 metres), and low to negligible from the wider area.

The planning authority concurred with the conclusion of the LVIA that overall landscape impacts would be moderate to low, subject to appropriate landscaping, which includes strengthening existing hedgerows and treelines and establishing some additional planting. I concur with this conclusion – from all the significant public viewpoints – either public roads or community areas such as churchyards, the nature of the topography and local vegetation ensures that any sight of panels would be intermittent and occasional and would not generally change the overall character of the landscape. The most significant impacts would be from nearby dwellings, although generally these would also be intermittent, and I note that the lands are worked farmland, which can be subject to various forms of visual change. A key viewpoint is from the burial ground at Skagh, which is elevated above the site, but this burial ground appears to be entirely within private lands and is not regularly visited – it appears to be heavily overgrown. The large hedgerow between this raised area and the site would, in any event, mitigate any impact on its setting. I therefore conclude that the proposed solar farm would not have a serious impact on the character of the local landscape and would not interfere with any protected landscapes, viewpoints, scenic routes, or areas of significant cultural or historical importance.

Glint & Glare Assessment

A Glint and Glare Assessment from Macroworks dated July 2023 (later updated) was submitted. This was based on a desk top analysis of the area, identifying receptors (19 dwellings in total) and subsequently modelling potential impacts.

A summary of the results is set out in Table 3.2 of the original report as submitted with the application. This indicated a number of dwellings with potential theoretical impact, although it is stated that none would have any impact when mitigation screening is taken into account. Following the further information request from the Council, changes were made in the screening to address possible impacts on one dwelling. The planning authority accepted that with mitigation there would be no significant impact from glint and glare on identified receptors.

Section 3.5 of the document assessed the potential impact on transport routes. This would primarily be on the N72, which runs directly south of the site. Significant areas of potential solar reflectance were identified (Figure 3.4 and Table 3.3 of the

report). It was concluded that with screening, there would be no significant safety hazard for road users.

The lands are on an elevated topography overlooking the wide and shallow Blackwater valley. The fields gently fall in level to the south and are at present relatively well screened from the existing dense hedgerow/treeline on either side. During my site visit I could not identify any clear views towards the site from the adjoining main roads, so I am satisfied that any hazard from glint and glare is very unlikely, and with appropriate mitigation (i.e. further strengthening of boundary hedgerows) can be eliminated. I am satisfied from the information provided – including the additional information and details provided following the further information request, that any direct impact from glint and glare can be eliminated by way of appropriate additional screen planting. There may be short term effects before the screening fully establishes. I would recommend a condition such that such landscaping requires sufficient maintenance and replacement planting as required to ensure any theoretical impact does not detract from the amenities of dwellings in the vicinity.

The Report did not address possible impacts from reflections on wildlife, but with regard to established scientific evidence on potential impacts on birds, specifically aquatic birds, and the absence of suitable habitat for such birds in the area, I am satisfied that this is not a significant concern. The planning authority set a condition (no.4) indicating that some panels be removed from the south-western corner of the development, but as this is already set out in the documents submitted on the 24th July 2024, I do not consider that this condition requires repeating.

Noise Assessment

The appellant has raised concerns about noise emissions from the proposed development, specifically operational noise from electrical installations and infrastructure. The applicant submitted a noise report by Moloney & Associates, with additional information submitted as part of the application and appeal process. Drawing no. 23025-XX-XX-XX-XX-DR-CBR-XE-003-P4-0 indicates the relationship between adjoining dwellings and potential noise environmental noise sources (primarily inverters and transformers). The submitted documentation assesses potential noise against BS 8233 and WHO criteria, and it is stated that an existing

solar farm in Inniscarra was used to calibrate real world noise emissions (including tonal noise, using ISO 1996 – 2:2017(E) criteria).

Projected noise (cumulative) from each inverter/transformer and their impacts on identified noise sensitive locations (NSL) are set out in Tables 5-1-5.3 of the Noise report. The closest inverter/transformer to any identified NSL is 121 metres, with most between 2-500 metres distant. It is noted that the inverters will only be active when the solar farm is generating power – i.e. during daylight hours (the transformer will be active for a full 24 hour period). It concludes that noise levels from the Transformer Station is less than 16dBA and thus considered negligible. It is stated that from measurements from other solar farms, tonal noise is not detectable over 100 metres.

The noise report compares projected noise levels to both British Standard and WHO criteria. Cumulative noise levels (Table 5.3) are indicated to range from 24 dBA to 35dBA at the five NSLs. This cumulative level would be considered to be within daytime acceptable ambient noise levels according to the above criteria, although 30dBA is considered the standard for 2300 to 0700 hours.

The general area is typical of a rural area, albeit with intermittent but significant traffic noise from the N72 running directly south of the site – this road is narrow and relatively lightly trafficked for a National Secondary Road, albeit with significant amounts of heavy vehicle movements. I note that there is also an ESB transformer station prominent just east of the site on the Boherbue Road. Although a significant local feature, there was no obvious noise emissions from this site apparent during my site visits. Apart from agricultural and possibly very occasional forestry operation, the area is otherwise relatively peaceful outside of the noise envelope of the N72.

I note that the planning authority accepted the Noise Report (following a further information request) and considered that a condition was sufficient to address any residual possible problem with noise from the solar farm. I concur with this conclusion – there is no evidence from existing solar farms that there is a significant noise amenity issue if the primary sources of noise (inverters and transformers) are adequately maintained and are located as far as possible from noise sensitive locations. I am satisfied that 100 metres is sufficient distance to ensure there are no amenity or health impacts from noise, provided there is a condition attached to

ensure noise reduction measures are implemented in the event of an unexpected problem – which can arise if the infrastructure is not well maintained.

Residential amenity, health and property values

Notwithstanding the issues addressed in more detail in the sections on noise and glint and glare below, the appellant raised specific concerns about the impact of the proposed development on the closest dwellings to the site, specifically arguing that:

- There should be at least a 500 metres separation of solar farms from dwellings.
- Concerns raised about noise emissions from inverters.
- Issue of possible health risks.
- Concerns raised about power surges and electromagnetic interference.
- Concerns raised about a loss of privacy from the CCTV cameras.
- It will devalue property values in the vicinity.

I note further claims in the final response letter – I do not consider that these add planning issues of relevance to the appeal.

In addition to the applicant's farmhouse, there are two dwellings in close proximity to the boundaries of the proposed development, in addition to several others along both adjoining roads and within several hundred metres of the landholding. The two closest dwellings to any apparatus are on the N72.

Following the original submissions on general amenity, property valuation and health concerns, a number of additional documents were submitted by the applicant, and all were considered satisfactory by the planning authority. The appellant has raised concerns about the impact on local properties by way of noise, health risks, electromagnetic impacts, and a loss of privacy. It is noted that neither the development plan nor national policy has detailed guidelines or criteria on assessing the impacts of commercial solar farms on local dwellings. There are no separation distances set out in guidelines, and standards for noise and other disturbance are general standards for all types of energy or other types of development.

As detailed in the noise and glint and glare sections of this report, while some impacts cannot be ruled out, I am satisfied that a combination of the provision of planting between the panels, and the separation distance from the nearby dwellings from inverters/panels ensures that any impacts are within guideline levels and within generally acceptable levels for amenity and consequent potential impacts on property values.

The appellant also raised concerns about loss of privacy from CCTV cameras on the site. As there is no security need for a camera to point at adjoining dwellings, I consider that this issue can be addressed by way of an appropriate condition.

The appellant also raised concerns about possible health impacts and electronic interference from apparatus associated with the works. There is no evidence available to indicate that any apparatus associated with the proposed development would have electromagnetic or other emission levels over and above normal electrical infrastructure required for the transmission network. No total energy output measures are provided by the applicant, but the overall output from a 10.5 hectare solar farm would be relatively modest and I note that it can be accommodated within the local transmission network. I would therefore conclude that there is no basis for considering that there would be any health or other direct impacts beyond those normal for electrical infrastructure in a rural area.

Biodiversity

In addition to the required AA screening (which concluded that no NIS was required, see AA section of this report below), the applicants submitted an **Ecological Impact Assessment Report** compiled by Ciaran Ryan, dated July 2023. This report is based on a desk top study and a site survey. An addendum to this report was submitted in August 2023.

The site is pasture – possibly arable in the past as there are some plough ridges visible – and the grassland is improved – the soil is well drained. The fields are used for silage primarily. The hedgerows are well developed, 3-5 metre high with a typical mix of hawthorn, willow, ash and understorey plants such as gorse, bramble and dog rose. There are deep drainage channels along the field boundaries, largely dry. These drains flow to a number of minor watercourses to the south which ultimately

drain to the Blackwater River. These drains are heavily modified and as such do not appear to provide good habitat for species such as otter.

The ecology report noted that there was no evidence from the site visit of badger setts, hares or other mammals of note. There are no watercourses present suitable for otter and no large trees suitable for bat roosts and there are no suitable foraging areas for bats. The site is within 10km of an SPA designated for hen harrier but has no suitable habitat for foraging or breeding for the QI species. Other native songbirds are likely to occur in the hedgerow and fields. There are no records of any rare or notable plant species. It is within the catchment of the Blackwater, which is an SAC, notably for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel.

The report concludes that there are no flora or fauna of significance on the site that could be impacted directly by the solar farm. There is potential impact on aquatic habitats off-site from construction if there is surface run-off laden with silt, sediment or nutrients. This issue is addressed in the AA Screening Report and associated CEMP. It is anticipated that the operational phase would have net benefits for wildlife through the strengthened landscaping and the release of the land from intensive agriculture. It is proposed to restore the land to agriculture when the permission for solar panels expires - a site restoration plan is attached with the application.

It is noted that a number of trees are to be removed on the site access road. These trees are relatively young and are mostly ash currently suffering from ash dieback – none have any potential for bat roosts. The works are to be carried out outside of the bird nesting season.

On the basis of the information submitted and my site visit, I am satisfied that the proposed development would have minimal impacts on biodiversity, and most negative impacts would occur during construction. The site is intensively worked farmland, used currently for silage cutting. There are no visible habitats suitable for bats, otters, badgers, or other species of note. There is no suitable foraging or nesting habitat on the site for the hen harrier or other bird species associated with the conservation objectives for habitats in the area. The proposed strengthening of hedgerows and landscaping will slightly improve the habitat value of the land over its lifetime.

Cultural heritage

The site is a farm complex with visible evidence of intensive cultivation (visible evidence of deep ploughing) with no visible remains or artificial structures, although the farmhouse (the access runs through the farmyard), appears to have an early 19th or 18th century origin (it is not on the NIAH register but appears to be on the earliest OS maps). There are no protected structures or buildings on the NIAH on or close to the site. There are no national monuments on the site or on adjoining lands, although there are several recorded ancient monuments within around 500 metres of the site, including a burial ground and rath to the north, a standing stone to the east across the Boherbue road, and one vernacular house remains to the south-east. There are a number of older farmhouses in the area, in addition to a lime kiln, although none of these are protected structures or recorded ancient monuments.

The applicant submitted an **Archaeological, Architectural and Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment** produced by Rubicon Heritage, dated July 2023. This document is based on a desktop study, geophysical survey and field walk and additionally sets out proposed mitigation measures subject to National Monuments Service Approval (archaeological testing during earthworks). No definite signs of archaeology were identified in the geophysical survey and field survey, although a number of linear anomalies were noted, most likely correlating with cultivation ridges, along with possible pits/postholes.

The study concludes that there would be no direct impact on sites of archaeological, architectural or cultural importance. It is noted that no demolition is proposed of any structures in the farmyard through which access for works is necessary. The visual setting of recorded ancient monuments, including the burial ground to the north, would not be impacted. Any residual impacts can be addressed by way of a condition such that there is archaeological monitoring of ground excavation works.

I am satisfied from the information provided that there would be no direct or significant indirect impacts on any sites of cultural or architectural significance. The site would be visible from the upper floors of the dwelling associated with the site – a fine early 19th century farmhouse, albeit one not identified in the NIAH or CDP as worthy of specific protection. Existing hedgerows and proposed planting would minimise any impact on the setting of recorded ancient monuments in the overall

area. I would recommend a condition such that archaeological monitoring be implemented for any groundworks.

Construction and traffic impacts

The applicants submitted a CEMP with the application. This sets out a Traffic Management Plan for construction, along with standard methodologies for the management of construction materials and wastes, and ecological protection measures in the course of the work. Specific sections address traffic management for safety and reducing amenity impacts, and noise/air quality issues, in addition to the reinstatement of excavated material after the construction stage.

I am satisfied that the information submitted is in line with best practice and addresses the specifics of the site, in particular the traffic access arrangements via the Boherbue Road (using the existing farm access).

Hydrology Appraisal/Flood Risk Assessment (WFD)

The lands are on well drained gently sloping agricultural land with no history of flooding. The applicants submitted a **Drainage Assessment and Strategy** from the Walsh Design Group. It is not proposed to significantly alter the drainage characteristics of the land as part of the proposed development – infiltration capacity and drainage are to be unchanged as part of the operation of the facility – hence there is no anticipated alteration to flood risk. Mitigation measures are set out to protect drains during construction and restoration.

The site overlies a locally important (LI) aquifer, of moderate to high vulnerability. There are no watercourses on the site (there are flowing land drains). It is within the Keale Stream_010 sub-catchment, which is part of the Blackwater (Munster)-070 catchment. The lands drain to the south, to the Blackwater valley. For a more detailed WFD screening assessment, the Screening Document is attached in the Appendix to this report.

The operation of the solar farm is not anticipated to have any significant impact on ground or surface waters and will not impact their WFD status. The construction and decommissioning phases will involve works that could potentially impact on

water quality by way of sediments or contaminated run-off. Mitigation measures set out in the CEMP addresses this by way of standard best practice procedure.

Decommissioning/Restoration Plan

The applicants submitted a restoration plan with the proposed development – it is proposed to remove all panels and associated structures at the end of the operational life/permission of the solar farm, with the lands restored to agricultural use,

Duration of the planning permission

The applicants have requested a 10 year permission for the site. The stated reason is that delays necessary to gain the necessary grid connection permission from the Regulator would ensure that it would be difficult to ensure a full completion of the solar farm within the statutory 5-year period. I note that this requested extension of time is now common for solar farm developments and ABP has granted these in the past. There is no national or local guidance on this matter. In the circumstances, I consider it reasonable to allow for an extended period for a permission.

9. EIA

The proposed development is not a class for the purposes of EIA as per the classes of development set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (or Part V of the 1994 Roads Regulations). No mandatory requirement for EIA therefore arises and there is also no requirement for a screening determination.

Refer to Form 1 in Appendix 1 of report.

10. Appropriate Assessment

10.1 Screening Determination

The Screening assessment forms are attached in the appendix to this report below. I have considered the proposed solar farm in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. The subject site is located in

open countryside on improved pasture. The proposed development comprises the erection of solar panels on open grassland with some associated access and cabling works – these do not involve significant alteration to the existing drainage of the site, and any alteration/removal of hedgerows and trees is relatively small scale and is not significant. Surveys submitted with the application have not identified any habitats of significant value on the lands and any trees to be removed are relatively young. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because it could not have any effect on a European Site.

The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The nature of the works, in particular the restriction of all but minor parts of the works to intensively worked improved pasture.
- The absence of any habitats on or close to the site associated with the nesting or foraging of species associated with the Qualifying Interests of any European Sites within 15 km of the area.
- The protective measures for construction works set out in the submission documents, and,
- The attenuation distance between the site and the River Blackwater.

I conclude, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

11. Recommendation

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

Reasons and Considerations

The Board performed its functions in relation to the making of its decision, in a manner consistent with Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Act 2015, as amended by Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, (consistent with the relevant provisions of the Climate Action Plan 2024 and Climate Action Plan 2025 and the Long-term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions 2024, the National Adaptation Framework; Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland June 2024 and the relevant sectoral adaptation plans in particular the Electricity and Gas Sectoral Plan 2019 and in furtherance of the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State), and otherwise had regard to:

European, national, regional and local planning, energy, climate and other policy of relevance, including in particular the following:

European Policy/Legislation including:

Directive 2014/52/EU amending Directive 2011/92/EU (Environmental Impact Assessment Directive);

Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive) and Directive 79/409/EEC as amended by 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive);

Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive)

National Policy and Guidance including:

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (“NPF”), First Revision of the NPF;

National Development Plan 2021-2030

The objectives and targets of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030;

Policy Statement on Security of Electricity Supply (November 2021);

National Energy Security Framework (April 2022);

National Energy and Climate Action Plan (2021-2030);

Regional and Local Planning Policy, including in particular:

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (2020-2032);

Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028;

- (a) The location, nature, scale and layout of the proposed development
- (b) The pattern of development within the area and context of the receiving environment,
- (c) The cultivated nature of the lands and the existing network of high hedgerows and treelines,
- (d) The mitigation measures proposed for the construction, operation and decommissioning of the site;
- (e) The submissions and observations on file, including those from prescribed bodies, the planning authority, and third parties;
- (f) The separation distances between the proposed development and dwellings or other sensitive receptors, along with the adequate provision of buffer planting when required,
- (g) The hydraulic characteristics of the site and the robust nature of the proposed development,
- (h) Measures proposed for the construction, operation and decommissioning of the development,
- (i) The submissions received in relation to the appeal
- (j) The Inspector's report and recommendation.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would be in accordance with European, national, and

regional renewable energy policies and with the provisions of the Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028, would not seriously injure the visual or residential amenities of the area or otherwise of property in the vicinity or have an of unacceptable impact on the character of the landscape or on cultural or archaeological heritage, would not have a significant adverse impact on ecology, would be acceptable in terms of traffic impacts and safety and would make a positive contribution to Ireland's renewable energy and security of energy supply requirements. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Appropriate Assessment Stage 1 Screening Determination

It is concluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) was not required.

Conditions

1. 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 the commencement of development, and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes all plans and particulars submitted with the further information on the 5th day of July 2024.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. The period during which development hereby permitted may be carried out shall be 10 years from the date of this Order.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

3. The permission shall be for a period of 40 years from the date of the commissioning of the solar array. The solar array and related ancillary structures shall be removed unless, prior to the end of the period, planning permission shall have been granted for their retention for a further period.

On full or partial decommissioning of the solar farm, or if the solar farm ceases operation for a period of more than one year, the solar arrays, including foundations/anchors, and all associated equipment, shall be dismantled and removed permanently from the site. The site shall be restored in accordance with this plan and all decommissioned structures shall be removed within three months of decommissioning.

This permission shall not be construed as any form of consent or agreement to a connection to the national grid or to the routing or nature of any such connection.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

4. All trees and plants provided as landscaping and mitigation shall be native species and where practical all seeds and plants shall be sourced locally.

Reason: To protect the natural biodiversity of the area

5. The applicant shall appoint a suitably qualified ecologist to monitor and ensure that all avoidance/mitigation measures relating to the protection of flora and fauna are carried out in accordance with best ecological practice and to liaise with consultants, the site contractor, and the planning authority. A report on the implementation of these measures shall be submitted to the planning authority and retained on file as a matter of public record.

Reason: To protect the environmental and natural heritage of the area.

6. The construction of the development shall be managed in accordance with a Construction and Environmental Management Plan, to include a Construction Traffic Management Plan, which shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to the commencement of development. This plan shall provide details of intended construction practice for the development, including:

Details of the site and material compounds, including areas identified for the storage of construction refuse;

Details of areas for construction site offices and staff facilities;

Details of site security fencing and hoardings;

Details of on-site car parking facilities for site workers during the course of construction;

Details of the timing and routing of construction traffic to and from the construction site and associated directional signage, to include proposals to facilitate the delivery of abnormal loads to the site;

Measures to obviate queuing of construction traffic on the adjoining road network;

Measure to prevent the spillage or deposit of clay, rubble or other debris on the public road network;

Details of appropriate mitigation measures for noise, dust and vibration, and monitoring of such levels'

The containment of all construction related fuel and oil within specially constructed bunds to ensure that fuel spillages are fully contained. Such bunds shall be roofed to exclude rainwater;

Off-site disposal of construction/demolition waste and details of how it is proposed to manage excavated soil;

Means to ensure that surface water run-off is controlled such that no silt or other pollutants enter local surface water sewers or drains.

A record of daily checks that the works are being undertaken in accordance with the CEMP shall be kept for inspection by the planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of amenities, public health and safety

7. All road surfaces, culverts, watercourses, verges, underground services and public lands shall be protected during construction, and, in the case of any damage occurring, shall be reinstated to the satisfaction of the planning authority. Prior to commencement of development, a road condition survey shall be taken to provide a basis for reinstatement works. Details in this regard shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In order to ensure a satisfactory standard of development.

8. The developer shall facilitate the preservation, recording and protection of archaeological materials or features that may exist within the site. In this regard, the developer shall;

Notify the planning authority in writing at least four weeks prior to the commencement of any site operation (including hydrological and geotechnical investigations) relating to the proposed development,

Employ a suitably qualified archaeologist who shall monitor all site investigations and other excavation works, and

Provide arrangements, acceptable to the planning authority, for the recording and for the removal of any archaeological material which the authority considers appropriate to remove.

In default of agreement on any of these requirements, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

Reason: In order to conserve the archaeological heritage of the site and to secure the preservation and protection of any remains that may exist within the site.

9. Prior to the commencement of development, the developer shall lodge with Cork County Council a cash deposit, a bond of an insurance company, or such other security as may be acceptable to the planning authority, to secure the satisfactory reinstatement of the site on cessation of the project coupled with an agreement empowering the planning authority to apply such security or part thereof to such reinstatement. The form and amount of the security

shall be as agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of agreement, shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

Reason: To ensure satisfactory reinstatement of the site.

10. The developer shall pay to the planning authority a financial contribution in respect of public infrastructure and facilities facilitating development the area of the planning authority that is provided or intended to be provided by or on behalf of an authority in accordance with the terms of the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Planning and development Act 2000, as amended. The contribution shall be paid prior to commencement of development or in such phased payments as the planning authority may facilitate and shall be subject to any applicable indexation provisions of the Scheme at the time of payment. Details of the application of the terms of the Scheme shall be agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of such agreement, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála to determine the proper application of the terms of the Scheme.

Reason: It is a requirement of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that a condition requiring a contribution in accordance with the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Act be applied to the permission.

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.

Philip Davis

Senior Planning Inspector

30th July 2025

Appendix 1 - EIA Pre-Screening

Case Reference	ABP-320819-24
Proposed Development Summary	10 year permission for a PV farm on 10.5 hectares
Development Address	Cloonbannin West, Mallow, County Cork.
	In all cases check box /or leave blank
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2.
	<input type="checkbox"/> No, No further action required.
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1. EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.	State the Class here
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Class specified in Part 1. Proceed to Q3	
3. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) OR a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of Roads Regulations 1994, AND does it meet/exceed the thresholds?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, the development is not of a Class Specified in Part 2, Schedule 5 or a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of the Roads Regulations, 1994. No Screening required.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold. EIA is Mandatory. No Screening Required	

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold. Preliminary examination required. (Form 2) OR If Schedule 7A information submitted proceed to Q4. (Form 3 Required)	State the Class and state the relevant threshold
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4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted AND is the development a Class of Development for the purposes of the EIA Directive (as identified in Q3)?	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Screening Determination required (Complete Form 3) <i>[Delete if not relevant]</i>
No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3) <i>[Delete if not relevant]</i>

Appendix 2

AA Screening Determination

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Screening Determination

Screening for Appropriate Assessment				
Test for likely significant effects				
Brief description of project		10 year permission for solar farm.		
Brief description of development site characteristics and potential impact mechanisms		10.5 hectare solar farm on agricultural land approximately 5 km north of the River Blackwater SAC – no other designated sites close by. The lands are improved grassland with no other significant works proposed.		
Screening report		Y		
Natura Impact Statement		No		
Relevant submissions		None		
Step 2. Identification of relevant European sites using the Source-pathway-receptor model				
European Site (code)	Qualifying interests ¹ Link to conservation objectives (NPWS, date)	Distance from proposed development (km)	Ecological connections ²	Consider further screening ³ Y/N
Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC 002170	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]	4-5 km	Within the same catchment – no direct link as the nearest tributary starts just south of the site.	N

	<p>Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima) [1330]</p> <p>Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410]</p> <p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0]</p> <p>Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p>Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</p> <p>Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</p> <p>Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p> <p>Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099]</p> <p>Alosa fallax fallax (Twait Shad) [1103]</p> <p>Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]</p> <p>Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]</p> <p>Vandenboschia speciosa (Killarney Fern) [6985]</p>			
Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mouth Eagle SPA (004161)	Hen harrier	10+km	None – there are no habitats on the site or in the vicinity with any value for roosting, breeding or foraging for hen harrier.	N

¹ Summary description / cross reference to NPWS website is acceptable at this stage in the report ² Based on source-pathway-receptor: Direct/ indirect/ tentative/ none, via surface water/ ground water/ air/ use of habitats by mobile species ³ if no connections: N				
AA Screening matrix				
Site name Qualifying interests		Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site*		
		Impacts	Effects	
Site 1: Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) 002170 Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation [3260] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion,		Direct: There are no direct works proposed impacting on the SAC or any tributary. A number of drains within the site (largely dry) drain into upper tributaries of the Blackwater. There are no works proposed that would directly impact on existing watercourses or the groundwater level. There is sufficient attenuation to ensure that the main project would not directly impact water quality. None of the species listed under QI are associated with the site or the area around the site. Indirect: In the absence of controls, run-off from the construction or reinstatement works could enter the main Blackwater by way of local drains, and then tributaries. This run-off could involve suspended solids or potential contaminants from spillages, etc. There are no permitted or proposed works in the area that could result in cumulative impacts over	There are no habitats on the site that are functionally connected to qualifying interests for the SAC – there are no proposals to significantly alter the hedgerows or treelines – all disturbance will be on existing improved grasslands. With standard controls as set out in the submission documentation, negative effects on the QIs – including the riverine and water habitats, and listed vertebrates and invertebrates can be ruled out.	

<p><i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</p> <p><i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p><i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</p> <p><i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</p> <p><i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p> <p><i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099]</p> <p><i>Alosa fallax fallax</i> (Twaite Shad) [1103]</p> <p><i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p> <p><i>Vandenboschia speciosa</i> (Killarney Fern) [6985]</p>	and above normal agricultural and forestry works typical of such areas.	
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	<p>If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects?</p> <p>There are no other plans or projects in the area where there is likely to be any in-combination effects.</p>	
	<p>Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site? None</p>	
	Impacts	Effects
<p>Site 2: Stacks to Mullaghareirk SPA 004161</p> <p>Hen Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>) [A082]</p>	<p>No direct impacts. The site is outside the foraging range of hen harrier and has no habitats suitable for roosting or breeding.</p> <p>No indirect or cumulative impacts. The site is sufficient distance from the SPA and any associated habitats and there are no pathways for pollution or other impacts. No</p>	None.

	prey species associated with the hen harrier are breeding on the site.	
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No.	
The proposed solar farm is on improved grassland and the works do not involve significant interference with drains, watercourses, hedges or treelines (there is some minor removal of trees and alterations to sections of hedgerow, mostly to strengthen them). The drains connect to the upper levels of a watercourse which is part of the Blackwater catchment, but there is sufficient attenuation such that standard methodologies to protect waterflows would ensure there is no run-off. There are no suitable habitats for any vertebrates identified in the QI's on or close to the site.		
Step 4 Conclude if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects on a European site		
I conclude that the proposed development (alone) would not result in likely significant effects on the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) 002170 or the Stacks to Mullaghareirrk SPA 004161 . The proposed development would have no likely significant effect in combination with other plans and projects on any European sites. No further assessment is required for the project.		
No mitigation measures are required to come to these conclusions.		

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Appendix 3

WFD Screening

WFD IMPACT ASSESSMENT STAGE 1: SCREENING

Step 1: Nature of the Project, the Site and Locality

An Bord Pleanála ref. no.	ABP-320819-24	Townland, address	Cloonbannin West, Mallow, Co. Cork
Description of project	10 year permission for a PV Farm on 10.5 hectares.		
Brief site description, relevant to WFD Screening,	The site is located on lands sloping gently to the south, towards the valley of the River Blackwater, some 4-5km away. The lands are improved grassland, currently used for silage. The lands are well drained, with land drains running in hedgerows parallel to the fields – these drains are generally dry, and on visual inspection there is no evidence of a high water table.		
Proposed surface water details	There are no proposals to alter the overall drainage of the site – modelling indicates that the overall run-off will not alter. Water will run freely off the solar panels into what will be maintained as grassland vegetation along with buffer zones.		
Proposed water supply source & available capacity	No water supply needed.		

Proposed wastewater treatment system & available capacity, other issues			None needed.			
Others?			Run-off to natural percolation and existing farm drains.			
Step 2: Identification of relevant water bodies and Step 3: S-P-R connection						
Identified water body	Distance to (m)	Water body name(s) (code)	WFD Status	Risk of not achieving WFD Objective e.g.at risk, review, not at risk	Identified pressures on that water body	Pathway linkage to water feature (e.g. surface run-off, drainage, groundwater)
River Waterbody	200m	Keale Stream_010	Good	Review	None	Land drains on the site drain to this stream. No direct impacts anticipated on these drains.

River Waterbody		100m	Blackwater (Munster)_080	Good	At risk	Hydromorphology, Agriculture	Not hydrologically connected to surface watercourses on the site.
Groundwater waterbody		Underlying site	Rathmore West	Good	Not at risk	No pressures	Free draining soil conditions.
Step 4: Detailed description of any component of the development or activity that may cause a risk of not achieving the WFD Objectives having regard to the S-P-R linkage.							
CONSTRUCTION PHASE							
No.	Component	Water body receptor (EPA Code)	Pathway (existing and new)	Potential for impact/ what is the possible impact	Screening Stage Mitigation Measure*	Residual Risk (yes/no) Detail	Determination** to proceed to Stage 2. Is there a risk to the water environment? (if 'screened' in or 'uncertain' proceed to Stage 2.

1.	Surface	Keale Stream _010	yes	Run-off to land drains from construction.	Standard water protection measures.	No	Screened out
2.	Surface	Blackwater (Munster)_080	None	None	None	No	Screened out
3.	Ground	Rathmore West	Drainage	Hydrocarbon Spillages	Standard Construction Measures / Conditions	No	Screened out
OPERATIONAL PHASE							
3.	Surface	0010	None	None	None	No	Screened out
		080	None	None	None	No	Screened out
4.	Ground	Rathmore West	None	None	None	No	Screened out
DECOMMISSIONING PHASE							
5.	Surface	010	yes	Run-off during removal of panels	Standard water protection measures.	No	Screened out
		080	None	None	None	No	Screened out.

	Groundwater	Rathmore West	Drainage	Spillages.	Standard construction measures.	No	Screened out
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