



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-320975-24

Development

Construction of a 300MW Open cycle
gas turbine plant

Location

Lands at Rathmorrissy/Polinagroagh,
Athenry, Co. Galway

Planning Authority

Galway County Council

Type of Application

Pre-application consultation under
section 37B of the Planning and
Development Act 2000, as amended

Prospective Applicant

Bord Gáis Energy

Inspector

Philip Davis

1. Introduction

The Coimisiún received a request on the 3rd October 2024 from the prospective applicant, Bord Gáis Energy, to enter into pre-application consultations under Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended ('2000 Act'), in relation to the proposed development of a 300MW Open Cycle Gas Turbine Plant on lands at Rathmorrissy/Polinagroagh, County Galway.

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 2000 Act.

Two pre-application consultation meetings were held with the prospective applicant on the 20th January 2025 and 28th May 2025. Records of the two meetings are on file. An email requesting closure of the consultation process was received on the 2nd July 2025.

This report provides an overview of the proposed development, as well as details of legislative provisions, and relevant precedent. My recommendation is that the proposed open cycle gas turbine plant does constitute strategic infrastructure development.

2. Site Location & Description

The site in question is agricultural grazing land of around 9.1 hectares in extent, just over 3 km west of the town Athenry in County Galway. It is on the north-east quadrant of the junction of the M6 and M18/19. The area is characterised by fields on gently rolling topography, mostly in pasture with some small areas of conifer plantation. Fields are generally bounded by ditches and patchy hedgerows, with many stone walls characteristic of limestone areas. The motorway junction - on raised embankments - is the most prominent local feature of the landscape. A third class road runs east to west north of the site, connecting to the south of Athenry. There are no houses on the site, but there are intermittent ribbons of residential development along the road network. North of the site are a number of small ponds, possibly turloughs, with the remains of a castle further north. The site is generally dry and well drained, with a farm lane connecting it to the road network to the north.

3. Proposed Development

The proposed development consists of the following main components:

- A 300 MW Open Cycle Gas Turbine (OCGT) plant primarily fuelled by natural gas, with a secondary diesel generator
- One emissions stack with a proposed height of 40-50 metres
- One 22-kV electrical transformer
- Secondary fuel (diesel) storage and transfer facilities.
- Workshop, stores, carpark and administrative buildings.
- Above ground gas installation (AGI).
- Ancillary grid connection infrastructure, and
- Ancillary infrastructure including internal roads, external lighting, security fencing, etc
- Associated landscaping.

Additionally, it is proposed to have an underground connection via the local road network to the Cashla 220 kV substation – this is located some 3km to the west.

The plant is intended to operate as a peaking plant with low annual use to provide power during periods of high demand and low renewable generation availability.

4. Prospective Applicant's Case

The prospective applicant's case, as outlined in the cover letter submitted can be summarised as follows:

- It is submitted by the applicant that the proposed development qualifies under the 7th Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as it constitutes an industrial installation for the production of energy, with a heat output of 300 megawatts.

With regard to Section 37A(2), it is submitted that:

- It is strategic in nature, as it is consistent with the Climate Action Plan 2024 and will facilitate government policy as set out in the documents 'Energy

Security in Ireland 2030' and 'Ireland's transition to a low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030' and will contribute to the objectives of the NPF and the RSES, specifically policies RPO 8.1; RPO 8.3 and RPO 8.4

5. Relevant Precedents

There is no relevant planning history or precedents on file for the proposed development.

6. Legislative provisions

6.1 Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended

The Seventh Schedule of the 2000 Act as amended lists the classes of infrastructure development which, if considered by the Board (Commission) to be strategic infrastructure development, would require direct application for permission to the Board (Commission) instead of the local planning authority. This list includes under 'Energy Infrastructure':

1. Development comprising for the purposes of any of the following:

A thermal power station or other combustion installation with a total energy output of 300 megawatts or more.

An industrial installation for the production of electricity, steam or hot water with a heat output of 300 megawatts or more.

7. Consultation Meeting

Two pre-application consultation meetings were held with the prospective applicant on the 20th January 2025 and 28th May 2025. The meeting records relating to this development proposal and the presentations made by the applicant to the Board's representatives are attached to the file.

8. Assessment

The definition of 'strategic infrastructure' for the purposes of Sections 37A and 37B of the 2000 Act, as revised, includes:

- A thermal power station or other combustion installation with a total energy output of 300 megawatts or more.*
- An industrial installation for the production of electricity, steam or hot water with a heat output of 300 megawatts or more.*
- An industrial installation for carrying gas, steam or hot water with a potential heat output of 300 megawatts or more, or transmission of electrical energy by overhead cables, where the voltage would be 220 kilovolts or more, but excluding any proposed development referred to in section 182A(1).*

The proposed power station is intended to act as a back up peaking plant for the grid to facilitate energy intensive commercial developments within the locality. It will be fuelled by natural gas from the Gas Networks Ireland network, with a low sulphur diesel oil backup. It is to be connected to the 220kv substation at Cashla. The need for the project is set out in section 5 of the original submission – it is argued that it is fully in line with national policy and the RSES and is strategically important for the further expansion of industrial development in the region. It is acknowledged by the prospective applicant that an EIAR is required, and one is now underway. Pre-planning consultations have taken place with the planning authority and TII.

Notwithstanding its policy context, the question put to the Commission now is whether it is strategic infrastructure for the purposes of Section 37 (A and B) of the 2000 Act, as amended. The nature and scale of the proposed development constitutes an installation for the production of electricity with an output of 300 megawatts or more, so it falls under the Seventh Schedule, and as such falls under the definition of 'strategic infrastructure'.

Also, with regard to Section 37A(2), the proposed development is of sufficient size and scale and is likely to be necessary to fulfil regional economic developments that require energy security in line with the Climate Action Plan 2025, the RSES, and

related national policy on energy security and securing a low carbon energy future ('Energy Security in Ireland 2030' (published 14 November 2023, updated 12 June 2025, and 'Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030 White Paper, published 19 June 2020). I note in particular the role of such peaking plants in maintaining grid stability and demand peaks in the context of an electrical system with a high dependency on renewables. As such, I concur with the argument put forward by the prospective applicant that the proposed development can be considered to be of strategic economic importance to the region and would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of objectives set out in the NPF and RSES with regard to energy resilience.

In conclusion, therefore, I recommend that An Coimisiún issues a determination that the proposed 300 MW OCGT plant falls within the scope of section 37B of the 2000 Act, as amended, and that a planning application should be made directly to the Coimisiún.

A list of prescribed bodies is set out in Appendix 1.

9. Recommendation

I recommend that the prospective applicant, Bord Gáis Energy, be informed that:

The proposed 300 MW Open Cycle Gas Turbine (OCGT) plant on lands at Rathmorrissey/Pollinagroagh, Athenry, County Galway, as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Coimisiún Pleanála on the 20th January 2025 and 28th May 2025 falls within the scope of section 37B and the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and that a planning application should therefore be made directly to An Coimisiún.

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

Date: 31st July 2025

Appendix 1: Prescribed Bodies

The following is a list of prescribed bodies considered relevant by the Coimisiún:

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Galway County Council
- Commission for the Regulation of Utilities
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Uisce Éireann
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Office of Public Works
- An Taisce
- Heritage Council
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland

Further notifications should also be made, where deemed appropriate.