



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-321507-24

Development

Construction of an 11-turbine windfarm, with individual power outputs of between 6.0 MW to 6.6 MW (total power output of ~ 66-73 MEC), and grid connection comprising loop-in Connection to Cashla-Dalton 110kV overhead line

Location

Townlands of Beagh More, Cloonbar, Cloonnaglasha, Cloonsheen, Cloonteen, Corillaun, Derrymore, Shancloon, Toberroe, and Tonacooleen in county Galway, near the Mayo border

Prospective Applicant

RWE Renewables Ireland Ltd.

Planning Authority

Galway County Council

Type of Application

Pre-Application Consultation under s.38B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended

Date of Site Inspection

7th March 2025

Inspector

Una O'Neill

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Board received a request on 16th December 2024 from Fehily Timoney and Company, acting on behalf of RWE Renewables Ireland Ltd. ('the prospective applicant'), to enter into pre-application consultation under section 37B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended ('the 2000 Act'), in relation to proposed development consisting of the construction of a 11 turbine wind farm and new 110kV substation, in the townlands of Beagh More, Cloonbar, Cloonnaglasha, Corillaun, Derrymore, Shancloon, Toberroe and Tonacooleen, Co. Galway.
- 1.2. One consultation meeting was subsequently held between An Bord Pleanála and the prospective applicant on 12th March 2025. The prospective applicant formally requested closure of the pre-application consultation process in a letter received by the Board on 7th May 2025.
- 1.3. This Report provides an overview of the proposed development, a summary of the meeting and the advice provided by the Board, the legislative provisions, relevant precedents and recommends that the Board determine that the proposed development does fall within the scope of section 37B of the 2000 Act. A recommended list of Prescribed Bodies, that should be forwarded copies of the application, is included in Appendix A.

2.0 Site location

- 2.1. The proposed site is located in the townlands of Beagh More, Cloonbar, Cloonnaglasha, Cloonsheen, Cloonteen, Corillaun, Derrymore, Shancloon, Toberroe, and Tonacooleen in County Galway, near the Mayo border. The closest settlements to the proposed development are Shrule (ca. 3.5 km to the west) and Tuam (ca. 8 km to the east). The area is rural in nature, with low density ribbon development along local roads.
- 2.2. The site currently comprises flat peatlands, agricultural land and scattered forestry. The peat habitats within and immediately adjacent to the proposed wind farm host the Annex I habitats European dry heaths (4030) and active raised bog (7110) (Cloonbar Bog). The proposed development lands are drained by the Corrib

Headford arterial drainage scheme. The associated drains and watercourses are heavily modified. These drain to the Black River (EPA waterbody name BLACK (SHRULE)_010) which is also part of the drainage scheme. The aquatic invasive species Canadian pondweed (*Elodea canadensis*) is present on sections of the drainage channels. There are nine SACs located within 15 km from the proposed wind farm site, there is one SPA located within 15 km of the proposed wind farm site and there are no NHAs and sixteen other pNHAs within 15 km of the site.

- 2.3. The Digital Terrain Model (DTM) for the site shows a maximum topographic height of 43.5 m above sea level (ASL).
- 2.4. The proposed substation would be connected via a loop-in connection to Cashla-Dalton 110kV overhead line.

3.0 Proposed Development

- 3.1. The proposed development comprises the following:
 - 11 wind turbines, with a ground to blade tip height of 180m.
 - Turbine foundations and crane pad hardstanding areas and associated drainage.
 - 13.7 km of internal access tracks (of which 1.77km will be floated road) and associated drainage infrastructure.
 - Upgrading of 3.565km of existing tracks and road and associated drainage.
 - 1 x new construction and operational access to the site from the L-2234 and one road crossing of the L-220-21.
 - Drainage and sediment control including interceptor drains, cross drains, settlement ponds and swales.
 - New watercourse crossings including 1 x 18.5m single span bridge crossing and 14 new piped culverts.
 - Associated excavation, earthworks and spoil management.
 - 3 x temporary construction compounds and ancillary infrastructure, including parking.

- 1 x onsite 110 kV electricity substation, associated new access road off L-6100 and associated construction compound.
- A loop-in 110 kV underground cable connection, 650m in length, connecting to the existing Cashla-Dalton 110 kV overhead line in the townland of Tonacooleen, with 2 x new 16m high steel loop-in lattice tower end masts or loop-in connection at the connection point.
- 33 kV underground electrical and communication cabling underground between the proposed turbines and the proposed on-site substation and associated Control Building.
- 1 x permanent meteorological mast to a height of 110m above ground level with a 4m lightning pole on top.
- Turbine delivery accommodation works:
- R332/L6483 junction – temporary load bearing surface to be laid and drainage ditch temporarily culverted; one utility pole permanently removed.
- L-6483 – temporary load bearing surface to be laid to provide a 4.5m running width and a 5.5m clearance width for turbine delivery. Vegetation to be cleared.
- L-6483 – temporary load bearing surface and vegetation to be cleared. 2 x road signs to be temporarily removed.
- Felling of 0.54 ha of conifer plantation forestry.
- 2.03km of hedgerow removal.
- 9.7ha of biodiversity enhancement lands, plus 2.45km of hedgerow/tree planting.

3.2. Three turbine types are proposed, Nordex N149 turbine (5.7MW output); Vesta 150 (5.6MW); and SG-155 (6.6MW). The turbines will have a tip height of between 179.2m to 180m; hub height of between 102.5m and 105m; and rotor diameter of 149.1m and 155m.

3.3. The applicant indicated that the site of the proposed turbines is located within an area identified in the Galway County Development Plan as being 'open to consideration'/tier 1 preferred (cluster of turbines) for wind energy.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. I am not aware of any relevant planning history relating to the application site.

5.0 Relevant Precedents

5.1. The following table outlines a sample of other SID pre-application determinations for wind farm developments of similar scales decided by the Board:

ABP Ref.	Location	Development Description	ABP Decision
320703	Mayo	19 turbines. Output of 70.05MW	Is SID
319601	Waterford	15 turbines. Output of 85.5MW to 108MW	Is SID
319219	Kerry	17 wind turbines. Output of 114MW to 136.8MW	Is SID
319215	Clare	9 wind turbines. Output of 51.3MW and 64.8MW	Is SID
319139	Limerick	9 wind turbines. Output of 54MW	Is SID
318203	Offaly	9 wind turbines. Output of 50.4MW	Is SID
315851	Tipperary	9-10 wind turbines. Greater than 50 MW output.	Is SID
315239	Clare	10 turbines. 60-66 MW output.	Is SID
315864	Mayo	21 wind turbines and grid connection. 72.45 MW output.	Is SID
314798	Kerry and Cork	11 wind turbines and grid connection. To exceed 50 MW output.	Is SID
314271	Meath and Westmeath	8 wind turbines and grid connection. 57.6 MW output.	Is SID

6.0 Pre-Application Consultation Meeting

6.1. One pre-application consultation meeting was held between An Bord Pleanála and the prospective applicant on 12th March 2025. Full details of the meetings and matters discussed are contained in the Board's records for the meetings.

6.2. The principal matters arising related to:

- Policy Context
- Noise Impact
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Ecological Assessments
- Water and hydrological considerations
- Cumulative Impacts, including visual and ornithological considerations
- Consideration of links to European sites
- Consultations

6.3. Letter Requesting Closure of Pre-Application Consultation

6.3.1. In the letter requesting closure of the pre-application consultation process (received on 7th May 2025), the prospective applicant's agent confirms that the proposed development is for an 11-turbine array and three turbine options are under consideration. The turbine particulars are presented as follows:

Hub Height	104.7m	105m	102.5m
Tip Height	179.25m	180m	180m
Rotor Diameter	149.1m	150m	155m
For Context Only:			
Export Capacity per turbine (MW)	5.7MW	5.6MW	6.6MW
Total Site	62.7MW	61.6MW	72.6MW

Capacity (MW)			
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- 6.3.2. It is stated that the total site capacity output of the proposed development will be 61.6MW to 72.6MW, depending on the final turbine selected.
- 6.3.3. The prospective applicant holds the opinion that the proposed development constitutes strategic infrastructure development.

7.0 Legislative Provisions

7.1. Planning and Development Act 2000, as Amended

- 7.1.1. Section 37A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides that an application for permission for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule shall be made directly to the Board if the proposed development would fall within one or more of the following paragraphs:

(a) the development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate,

(b) the development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the National Planning Framework or in any regional spatial and economic strategy in force in respect of the area or areas in which it would be situate,

(c) the development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

- 7.1.2. Class 1 of the Seventh Schedule relates to energy infrastructure and includes the following category of development:

‘an installation for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (a wind farm) with more than 25 turbines or having a total output greater than 50 megawatts’.

8.0 Assessment

8.1. Section 37A(1): Is the development specified in the Seventh Schedule of the Act?

- 8.1.1. Based on the information contained in the prospective applicant's cover letter and elaborated upon at the pre-application consultation meeting, and close-out request, the proposed development would provide 11 turbines with a total output of between 61.6 MW - 72.6 MW, depending on the turbine chosen. Based on the proposed output, the proposed development would exceed the 50MW threshold for wind farms set out in Class 1 (Energy Infrastructure) of the Seventh Schedule of the Act.
- 8.1.2. The proposed development would therefore satisfy section 37A(1) of the Act.

8.2. Section 37A(2): Does the Proposed Development fall within one or more of Sections 37A(2)(a), (b), and (c)?

S.37A(2)(a) - strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region

- 8.2.1. The prospective applicant's case is that the proposed development satisfies the condition under section 37A(2) of the Act due to its scale and the power output in excess of 50MW which is considered to be of strategic economic and social importance to the region and the State.
- 8.2.2. The proposed development will contribute to the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in line with national policies and objectives such as the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended), Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP 24), Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP 25), and Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework, specifically National Policy Objective 55. I further consider the proposed development would involve significant capital investment in the region and will create employment opportunities relating to the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the development. Additionally, rates will be made payable to Galway County Council by the developer and a Community Benefit Scheme will be put in place. All of these considerations will result in a positive impact on the economic profile of the subject area and investment in the region.

- 8.2.3. Having regard to the national and regional context, and the nature and scale of the proposed development, as outlined above, I am satisfied that the development would clearly be of strategic economic importance to the State and the region and would therefore satisfy the condition set out in section 37A(2)(a) of the Act.

S.37A(2)(b) - Fulfilment of NPF or RSES Objectives

- 8.2.4. It is submitted by the prospective applicant that the proposed development would contribute to the objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the provisions of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) 24, CAP 25, and The Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 (RSES).
- 8.2.5. Having reviewed the NPF, I note the following relevant National Strategic Outcome 8 (NSO 8) and National Policy Objectives (NPOs) 54 and 55 which seek to encourage, facilitate and harness renewable energy sources including wind at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050.
- 8.2.6. At a regional level, the Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032 supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the region, stating that the renewable energy needs of the region, in the form of wind, solar and biomass, will be likely to be met in rural areas.
- 8.2.7. The proposal to generate over 50MW of renewable energy by using wind as a resource would assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and would contribute significantly towards the achievement of a low carbon economy. In this regard, I am satisfied that the development would meet relevant NPOs of the NPF and would serve to fulfil the relevant RPOs of the RSES. The development would therefore satisfy the requirement set out in Section 37A(2)(b) of the Act.

S. 37A(2)(c) - Significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority

- 8.2.8. The windfarm site is within the Galway County Council administrative area, proximate to the boundary with Mayo County Council. The project will be connected to the national grid and will provide renewable energy to the region, which could power approximately 41,300-45,500 homes and displace the emission from other less clean forms of energy generation.

- 8.2.9. I consider that the Board could reasonably come to the conclusion that the development would have an effect on an area of more than one planning authority. Accordingly, I am also of the opinion that the proposed development would also fall within the scope of section 37A(2)(c).

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. Based on the above assessment, it can be concluded that the proposed development would exceed the threshold set out in the Seventh Schedule of the Act and therefore satisfies the requirements of section 37A(1) of the Act. It can also be determined that the requirements of sections 37A(2)(a)(b) and (c) of the Act.
- 9.2. I recommend that the Board serve a notice on the prospective applicant, pursuant to Section 37(B)(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, stating that it is of the opinion that the proposed development constitutes a strategic infrastructure development within the meaning of Section 37A of the Act for the reasons and considerations set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the size, scale and location of the proposed windfarm and related development, and to the policy context, it is considered that the proposed development comprising the development of a 11-turbine windfarm with an overall output of over 50 MW with associated infrastructure, on a site in the townlands of Beagh More, Cloonbar, Cloonnaglasha, Corillaun, Derrymore, Shancloon, Toberroe and Tonacooleen, in Co. Galway constitutes development that falls within the definition of energy infrastructure in the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, thereby satisfying the requirements set out in Section 37A(1) of the Act.

The proposed development is also considered to be of strategic importance by reference to the requirements of Section 37A(2)(a), 37A(2)(b), and 37A(2)(c) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. An application for permission for

the proposed development must therefore be made directly to An Bord Pleanála under Section 37E of the Act.

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.



Una O'Neill

Senior Planning Inspector

21st May 2025

Appendix A: Prescribed Bodies

The following is a list of prescribed bodies considered relevant for the purposes of section 37E(3)(c) of the Act:

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Development Applications Unit)
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Galway County Council
- Mayo County Council
- The Northern and Western Regional Assembly
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- Heritage Council
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Office of Public Works
- Uisce Eireann
- Irish Aviation Authority
- Health Service Executive
- Commission for Regulation of Utilities

Further notifications should also be made, where deemed appropriate.