



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ACP-323988-26

Development

Proposed new 110kV Substation to connect into the existing Thornsbury substation.

Location

Located at Ballyteige Little, Co. Offaly
(www.colehillside110kv.ie)

Planning Authority

Offaly County Council

Applicant(s)

Ballyteige Solar Limited

Type of Application

Application for approval under section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.

Prescribed Bodies

- Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Commission for Regulations of Utilities, Water and Energy
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- Health and Safety Authority

Observers	Yasmin Esani
Date of Site Inspection	25/05/2026
Inspector	Hugh O'Neill

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1 Introduction

This case concerns an application for strategic infrastructure under section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

This application has been made on foot of pre-application discussions with the Commission under ABP-316480-23 for a 110kV substation, underground cables and related ancillary infrastructure, where An Coimisiún decided that the development would fall within the scope of section 182A of the Act and would be strategic infrastructure.

The 110Kv substation is proposed in the location of, and in lieu of, a 38kV substation consented by the Planning Authority as part of solar farm development ref:2198. See planning history section of this report for further detail.

2 Site Location and Description

The site extends to 11.2 ha in the Townlands of Ballyteige Little, Wood of O, Corndarragh, Derrynagall or Ballydaly, Ardan and Puttaghan, Co. Offaly.

The proposed Colehill 110kV substation is found approximately 5.8km northeast of Tullamore, 300m southwest of the Kilbeggan branch and c. 1.75 north of main line of the grand canal.

The proposed substation site consists of a field of improved agricultural grassland with boundaries defined by field drains/watercourses and hedgerow of variable condition. The north and east boundaries of the proposed substation site are formed by the Ballyteige Little stream. This stream also forms the boundary between the Townlands of Ballyteige Little and Wood of O.

Downstream of the substation site the Ballyteige Little stream flows into the Corndarragh Stream, which in turn flows into the Tullamore River which flows through the centre of Tullamore town before flowing through Charleville Wood SAC 000571.

Access to the substation is proposed from the public road via approximately 200m of an existing surfaced laneway. This entrance and laneway, together with the substation site, is subject to an existing planning consent for access associated with a utility-scale solar PV development.

The application site extends beneath and to the northeastern side of the canal to facilitate an HDD installation of a cable connection to a solar farm.

The 110kV grid route from proposed Colehill 110kV substation to the existing ESB Thornsberry 110kV substation consists of 7.5km of underground cable in private land and local roads.

The cable route passes within the roadway associated with the canal branch line and as a result is in proximity to, Tongs bridge and Wood of O bridge both protected structures.

The c.7.5km proposed cable route is characterised by a high density (Circa 120no.) of single houses and numerous farmyards.

The cable route is proposed to cross the Corndarragh Stream along the L1025 by way of HDD.

The existing Thornsberry 110kV substation at which the grid connection is proposed is approximately 2km northeast of Tullamore and 1km northeast of the N52.

Current land use of the application site is agriculture and roadway. The application site is not subject to a land use zoning objective in the Offaly County Development Plan.

3 Proposed Development

The proposed development for which a ten-year permission under Section 182A is for a new 110kV Substation and cable route to connect Ballyteige Solar Farm (PA Ref:2198), and the Derrygrogan Solar Farm (PA Ref:22378 and ABP 318041-23) into the existing Thornsberry Substation and consists of the following:

- Removal of 67 linear meters of hedging in the proposed location of the substation construction compound.
- Construction of construction compound.
- A permanent 110kV Air Insulated Switchgear Substation consisting of:
 - 1 No. Compound (c.8733m²) consisting of; 3 No. work areas, CCTV, associated drainage enclosed in 2.6m high palisade fencing and gates.

- 1 No. Eirgrid control building (c.440.15m²), 110kV bay arrangement, 4 No. lightning poles, compound road.
- Crane hardstand, 2 No. transformers and 2 No. auxiliary transformers, 110kV electrical equipment and back-up generator:
- 2 No. Independent Power Purchaser (IPP) control buildings (total 147.3m²) and compound including toilet.
- 2 No. grid code compliance equipment, 2 No. harmonic filters, car parking and telecoms pole.
- Perimeter fencing.
- Access tracks (upgraded, existing and new).
- Temporary construction compound and tracks
- Temporary and permanent road realignment of a section of Wood of O local road.
- c. 7.5km of underground 110kV cabling with joint bays on access track and local roads with associated horizontal directional drilling.
- c. 610m of medium voltage underground cabling trenching with associated horizontal directional drilling.
- All associated and ancillary site development, excavation, construction, landscaping and reinstatement works and the provision of site drainage.

The site of the proposed development has a total area of 11.02 hectares.

No connection is proposed for water supply or wastewater disposal to or from the proposal, soakaway pits and infiltration drains are proposed for the disposal of surface water.

The application to the Commission includes:

- Application Form
- Copy of Site Notice
- Copy of Newspaper Notice (Irish Independent, Tullamore Tribune and Offaly Topic)
- Landowner Consent Letter

- SID Determination Letter
- Schedule of Planning Drawings
- Schedule of Pre-Application Consultation
- Volume 1:
 - Planning Statement
 - Natura Impact Statement
- Volume 2:
 - Infrastructure Drawings
- Volume 3:
 - Technical Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
 - Technical Appendix 2: Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)
 - Technical Appendix 3: Archaeological and Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment (AAHIA)
 - Technical Appendix 4: Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA)
 - Technical Appendix 5: Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)
 - Technical Appendix 6: Preliminary Construction Traffic Management Plan (PCTMP)
 - Technical Appendix 7: Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (OCEMP)
 - Technical Appendix 8: Assessment of Acoustic Impact (AAI)

The applicant created a standalone website for the development, www.colehillsid110kv.ie.

4 Consultations

4.1 Prescribed Bodies

Details of the application to An Coimisiún were circulated to the following prescribed bodies:

- Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Commission for Regulations of Utilities, Water and Energy

- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- An Taisce
- An Comhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- Health and Safety Authority

No submissions were received from prescribed bodies except for Offaly County Council which is addressed below.

4.2 Public Submissions

A single submission was received from a resident of local road L1025 along which the 7.5km underground cable connection is proposed. The property in question is located at c.3.4km from the proposed substation.

I have summarised concerns set out in that submission as follows:

- Proximity to residential property leading to concerns regarding:
 - Electromagnetic fields (EMF's)
 - Noise
 - Amenity
- Risk to mains water
 - Risk to groundwater by contamination during works
 - Hydrogeological assessment lacking in the proposal.
 - Proximity to private well belonging to the submitter.
- Destruction of wetlands, boglands, ecologically sensitive habitats
 - NIS inadequate to comply with 6(3) of habitats directive.
- Destruction of mature hedgerow and woodland
- Cumulative Impact with 2 separate solar farms
 - Cumulative landscape impact assessment required.
- Inadequate road infrastructure

- The requirement for road upgrades is evidence that network is inadequate.
- Absence of statutory guidelines
- A full oral hearing is requested which the submission considers to be warranted given the scale, complexity, and irreversible nature of the proposed development.

4.3 Planning Authority

The planning authority submitted a report to An Coimisiún on the 19/03/26 in response to correspondence from An Coimisiún dated 16/02/26.

I have summarised the contents of the Planning Authority Report as follows.

- Planning history demonstrates the context and need for the substation and grid connection.
- Policy context demonstrates support for grid enhancement.
- Designations including European sites and NHA's, demonstrate an absence of constraints in the immediate vicinity of the site.
- Built heritage designations present no immediate constraints to the proposal. Conditions recommended re: Archaeological monitoring of works.
- The PA re satisfied with surface water drainage and flooding aspects of the proposal subject to conditions.
- Taking account of the sensitivity and the screening, landscape and visual impacts are not considered significant.
- No concerns regarding the carrying capacity of road network. A number of conditions relating to road reinstatement and traffic management are recommended.
- A consideration of the environmental carrying capacity of the site and surrounding area is set out. Conditions of a standard nature recommended.

Conditions recommended by the PA in the event grant of permission are generally of a standard nature and are assessed in section 9 below.

The submission states that the Planning Authority are of the view that a Community Benefit scheme should be established for a period of 5 years.

The submission states no matters arise which warrant a refusal of planning permission.

4.4 Applicant's Response

The submission on the file from the PA, prescribed bodies and public observers have been circulated to the applicant. The response received from the applicant addresses each submission made. I have summarised these as follows:

Proximity to residential dwellings and impact thereon.

- The area is subject to human influence due to the urban/peri urban area nature and road infrastructure in the area.
- No significant visual effects will arise as a result of the proposal as demonstrated in the LVIA.
- The Acoustic Impact Assessment submitted with the application demonstrates the absence of significant noise impacts.
- The substation and the cable will generate electromagnetic fields at levels at which no risk has been identified and will be in full compliance with the EU and Eirgrid guidelines and design requirements.

Local water supply and hydrogeological impacts.

The hydrological and hydrogeological context of the site has been considered in detail. There are no public water supply sources in the vicinity of the proposal, and no viable pathway has been identified to any sensitive groundwater receptor. Risks of pollution including by fuel spill are addressed by way of mitigation measures in the outline Construction and Environmental Management Plan oCEMP. Concerns raised are not supported by the characteristics of the site or of the proposal.

Risks to surface water bodies have been identified and mitigated in the design of the proposal and are set out in the oCEMP.

Impact on wetlands, boglands and ecological habitats

The NIS and EclA have identified no concerns regarding impact on wetlands, boglands or ecological habitats.

Removal of hedgerows, trees and woodland

The proposal has been designed to avoid impacts on hedgerows, trees and woodland in so far as possible. The extent of hedgerow removal is limited to that required to facilitate access. Along with the 7 trees proposed to be removed the scale of impact is at the lower end. A biodiversity management plan has been submitted which contains habitat enhancement measures.

Cumulative impact with associated solar developments

Visual impact in cumulation with the adjacent solar farms has been considered in the LVIA. Taking account of the low landscape sensitivity, dispersed nature of the solar developments any potential impact is localised and limited to an extent that cumulative effects are not significant.

Traffic, access and road infrastructure

A preliminary Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) was submitted with the application, with a final plan to be agreed between contractor and council. Traffic generation is minor; the haul route is suitable and has been tested for the largest vehicles. Localised constraints have been identified and addressed through engineering measures.

Absence of specific planning guidelines

There is extensive policy support for the proposal set out by the developer at each stage of the application including in the response to submissions.

The applicant response notes the acceptance of the principle of the development by the Planning Authority, the generally standard nature of the proposed conditions and the absence of any issues being identified by the PA.

5 Planning History

The following planning applications are relevant to the proposed development:

5.1 Adjacent to proposed Colehill 110kV substation

21 /98: Permission granted for a period of 5 years to construct and complete a solar PV energy development with a total site area of 60.53 hectares for operational period of 35-years including a 38kV substation in the location of the now proposed 110kV Colehill Substation.

22/378 and ABP 318041-23: Permission granted for a period of 10 years to construct and complete a 73.9-hectare solar PV energy development farm to be operational for 35 years.

2660071 PA granted permission for amendment of a previously consented development (RED III) (Planning Reference 2198 by Offaly County Council) removing all consented infrastructure (38kV substation) in the location of the proposed 110kV substation subject of this application. The application also comprises.

- (i) removal of the 38kV substation and infrastructure within the most northern field (Field 1),
- (ii) internal access track reduced from c.3.4km to c. 3.2km, relocated and tweaked to include turning areas,
- (iii) replacement of string inverters instead of combined central inverters and MV transformers, the central MV transformers remain, and increase from 11No. to 12 No., however there will be a reduction in their associated hardstanding areas, and the number of string inverters is 128,
- (iv) table layout updated (reduced),
- (v) PV angle tilt reduced from 10° and 40° to 10° and 30°,
- (vi) separation area between infrastructure and OHL towers increased,
- (vii) an additional badger sett buffer added.
- (viii) temporary construction compound has been relocated from Field 1 to Field 4,
- (ix) alter Condition No. 10 to increase the boundary fencing from 1.8m-2m high to 2.4m high and reduce in the perimeter fence length,
- (x) CCTV number increase from 81 to 118 and their locations have been amended,
- (xi) adjustment of the development period from 5 years to 10 years, and
- (xii) alter Condition No. 11 to change the operational lifetime from 35 years to 40 years.

The planning application area comprises of 60.53 hectares and comprises of a Solar PV development (i.e. a relevant solar energy development as per the Renewable Energy Directive III) and was accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement (NIS).

5.2 North of proposed Colehill substation

218 10-year permission granted 23/11/2021 for 52.75Ha solar farm and 68 no battery energy storage units c. 3.3km north of application site with c. 9.38km cable connection in same road as that proposed in the subject application connecting to Thornsberry substation.

2660233 Live application c. 1.5km to north (RED III). Contiguous to **22/378 and ABP 318041-23**, Solar PV development (i.e. a relevant solar energy development as per the Renewable Energy Directive III) with a total site area of c. 28.1 hectares decision due 15/07/2026

5.3 Adjacent to exiting Thornsberry 110kV substation.

2460002 10-year permission granted on 17/04/2024 immediately adjacent to Thornsberry 110kV substation for grid system services facility including 20 no. electrical inverter/transformer station modules and up to 80 no. containerised battery blocks.

2660248 live application, decision due 29/06/2026, immediately adjacent to Thornsberry 110kV substation. Revised site design for a Battery Energy Storage System facility permitted under Ref No. 24/60002, incorporating between 28 no. and 112 no. battery containers with a difference in height of between 4m and 5.5m, with revised access from the L1024. Pursuant to Section 32H (1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

6 Policy Context

6.1 European policy

2030 Climate and Energy Framework (October 2014) The European Council endorsed EU-wide binding targets for 2021 to 2030 of 1) at least 40% less greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 and 2) at least 27% renewable energy consumption in 2030.

Regulation (EU) 2018/842 Ireland's binding greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2030 in relation to 2005 levels is 30%, to comply with Paris Agreement commitments.

European Green Deal 2020 aims to make Europe climate neutral by 2050, by doubling the share of renewable energy in the energy mix by 2030, compared to 2020, to reach at least 40%.

REPowerEU Plan 2022 & Directive EU 2018/2001 (REDII) (amended 18.05.2022)

The REPowerEU Plan amended the RED II Directive, to require that 42.5% of energy is from renewable sources by 2030.

Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 (22nd December 2022) This binding Regulation works together with the RED Directives. Article 3 introduced a rebuttable presumption that renewable energy projects are of overriding public interest, for the purposes of the relevant competing environmental legislation, being the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive and the Water Framework Directive. Paragraph 8 states that 'It is possible for Member States to consider applying this presumption in their relevant national legislation on landscaping'.

Regulation 2024/223 (22 December 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2022/2577)

Paragraph 14 states that 'Article 3(2) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 requires priority to be given to projects that are recognised as being of overriding public interest ...where those projects introduce additional compensation requirements for species protection. ... The first sentence of Article 3(2) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 has the potential, ..., to further accelerate renewable energy projects since it requires Member States to promote those renewable energy projects by giving them priority when dealing with different conflicting interests beyond environmental matters in the context of Member States' planning and the permit-granting process'.

RED III (European Renewable Energy Directive (EU/2023/2413)) sets a binding renewable energy target that by 2030, at least 42.5% of energy will come from renewable sources, but aims for 45%, significantly raising the previous 32% target in RED II and the EU's 2030 Climate and Energy Framework.

6.2 National Policy and Legislation:

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

This 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 principal 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.

6.2.2 Climate Action Plan 2025 (2024) (CAP)

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.

6.2.3 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.

6.2.4 Electricity and Gas Network Climate Change Sectoral Plan 2025 (EGN SAP 2025)

The aim of this second sectoral adaptation plan is to address the risks posed by climate change to the electricity and gas networks. The Plan identifies and assesses impacts and risks across two Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) climate scenarios (RCP4.5 and RCP8.5) and for mid-century, in line with Ireland's climate objective of achieving a climate neutral economy by 2050 and a Climate Action Plan target of 80% renewable energy generation by 2030. Proactive adaptation measures are set out which include diversifying energy sources, including commercial scale PV to prepare for a carbon neutral energy system by 2050.

6.2.5 Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework, 2018 (updated April 2025) NPF first revision

National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) No 8 'Transition to a Carbon Neutral and Climate Resilient Society', states Ireland will have a more renewables-focused energy generation system harnessing energy sources such as solar and refers to greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act and the Climate Action Plan 2024. It also states that

the accelerated delivery of additional renewable electricity generation is therefore essential for Ireland to meet its climate targets, reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and improve its energy security by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and diversifying its electricity supply. Overall, it is a green energy objective to deliver 80% of our electricity needs from renewable sources by 2030.

Chapter 9 'Climate Transition and Our Environment' states that the Framework can support the response to climate change through a variety of measures including through the accelerated roll out of onshore wind energy and solar development. Under the heading of 'Renewable Electricity' the 'Government has set ambitious targets to achieve 8 GW of solar by 2030'.

National Policy Objective 23 - Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape ...

National Policy Objective 30 - Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting biodiversity and the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.

National Policy Objective 70 (formerly NPO 55) seeks to 'promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a climate neutral economy by 2050'. 'Regional Renewable Electricity Capacity Allocations' for the Eastern and Midlands region notes that 306MW of solar had been energised in 2023 with an additional capacity allocation of 3,294MW out to 2030. These targets form part of NPO 74 and are required to be planned for through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

6.2.6 Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which we value and protect nature. The NBAP will continue to implement actions within the framework of five strategic objectives, while addressing new and emerging issues:

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.

6.2.7 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 in the overriding public interest, and the interest of public safety, and the Government supports this request.

6.2.8 National Development Plan 2021-2030

Includes a Strategic Investment Priority for Renewable Energy that states, 'Regular Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions will deliver competitive levels of onshore wind and solar electricity generation which indicatively could be up to 2.5 GW of grid-scale solar and up to 8 GW of onshore wind by 2030'. National Development Plan Review 2025 It notes €500 million has been allocated to the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment to fund projects and programmes that will support climate mitigation and renewable energy development.

6.2.9 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.

6.3 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031

Enabling and Sustaining the Rural Economy.

Energy production, including renewable energy in the form of wind, solar and biomass have to date largely been provided in rural areas and the location of future renewable energy production is likely to be met in rural areas which is supported at a larger scale on appropriate sites in accordance with National policy and the Regional Policy Objectives.

The Strategy supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the Region including solar.

Regional Strategic Outcome 9 is to support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables-focussed energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050. (NSO 8, 9)

RPO 3.5 Identification of suitable employment and residential lands and suitable sites for infrastructure should be supported by a quality site selection process that addresses environmental concerns such as landscape, cultural heritage, ensuring the protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity as a minimum.

RPO 3.7 Local authorities shall have regard to environmental and sustainability considerations for meeting sustainable development targets and climate action commitments, in accordance with the National Adaptation Framework. In order to recognise the potential for impacts on the environment, Local authorities shall address the proper site/route selection of any new development and examine environmental constraints including but not limited to biodiversity, flooding,

landscape, cultural heritage, material assets, including the capacity of services to serve any new development.

RPO 7.15 Local authorities shall take opportunities to enhance biodiversity and amenities and to ensure the protection of environmentally sensitive sites and habitats, including where flood risk management measures are planned.

RPO 7.27: Following the adoption of a national landscape character assessment, the Assembly will prepare a Regional Landscape Character Assessment to promote better landscape management and planning in the Region.

RPO 10.20: Support and facilitate the development of enhanced electricity and gas supplies, and associated networks, to serve the existing and future needs of the Region and facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects that might be brought forward in the lifetime of this Strategy. This includes the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to facilitate linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity and gas transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process.

6.4 Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027

Mapped provisions

The subject site is located.

- Entirely within the Rural Area Under Strong Urban Influence
- Primarily within the Low Landscape Sensitivity Area, the cable route along and under the canal fall within the grand Canal Area of High Amenity, area of high landscape sensitivity and within the Grand Canal pNHA.
- Is within 330 metres from the 'Other Eskers' Area of High Amenity.
- The site runs immediately adjacent to 3 protected structures in the form of Tongs bridge RPS 24-011, Wood of O bridge RPS 24-012 and Saints Francis of Assisi and Bridget Church RPS 24-010

Chapter 3: Climate Action and Energy

Electricity Transmission and Distribution

CAEP-01: It is Council policy to support and facilitate the development, reinforcement, renewal and expansion of the electricity transmission and distribution grid, including the development of new lines, pylons and substations as required to provide for the future physical and economic development of Offaly.

CAEP-03: It is Council policy that proposals for new electricity distribution lines 38 kV or above along with transmission lines 110 kV or above will be considered subject to the protection of Designated and Non Designated Sites as outlined in Objectives BLO-02 to BLO-06 and landscape considerations as outlined in objectives BLO-22 Areas of High Amenity, BLO-24 Landscape and BLO 26 and BLO-27 Protection of Key Scenic Views, Prospects and Key Amenity Routes.

CAEP-05: It is Council policy to support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission and distribution network to facilitate planned growth and transmission/ distribution of a renewable energy focused generation across the major demand centres. This includes:

- Facilitating trans-boundary networks into and through the County and Region to ensure the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
- Facilitate the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to allow linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner; and
- Support the safeguarding of strategic energy corridors from encroachment by other developments that could compromise the delivery of energy networks.

Reasonable Alternatives and Existing Infrastructural Assets

CAEP-23: It is Council policy to require that environmental assessments should address reasonable alternatives for the location of new energy developments, and where existing infrastructural assets such as sub-stations, power lines and roads already exist within the proposed development areas, then such assets should be considered for sustainable use by the proposed development where the assets have capacity to absorb the new development.

Renewable Energy

CAEP-27: It is Council policy to ensure that whenever possible, community benefits are derived from all renewable energy development in the county such as near-

neighbour benefit funds and general community benefit funds, which may take the form of contributions in kind to local projects, assets and facilities such as public amenities on the renewable energy site, measures to promote energy efficiency or a local energy discount scheme.

4.8 Lakes, Waterways and Wetland Landscapes

The Council recognises the importance of riparian buffer zones, which are strips of vegetated land bordering a river or stream, which can protect a watercourse from the impact of human activity or development in an area....

4.9 Trees, Forestry and Hedgerows

Trees, forestry and hedgerows make a valuable contribution to the landscape and visual amenity of County Offaly and provide wider environmental benefits that include carbon storage.

4.13.1 Areas of High Amenity - Waterways and Wetlands

The Grand Canal is a focus for a wide range of uses, especially for recreation and tourism purposes. The visual quality of the surrounding areas is intrinsic to maintain the attractiveness of the Grand Canal corridor. Hence, the corridor is especially sensitive to large development structures, insensitively designed or sited housing and large-scale land uses such as extractive industries.

Developments, which require vehicular access from public roads that were formerly towpaths or from existing towpaths along the Grand Canal, are required to be strictly controlled (refer to Policy BHP-27 in Chapter 10)

4.14 Landscape

Developments which are likely to create a significant environmental and particularly visual impact will best be absorbed into areas where the landscape is most robust, i.e. has the capacity to absorb development without significantly changing its character. All developments should be assessed on a site-by-site basis to avoid, minimise or mitigate any potential environmental or visual impact.

Low sensitivity areas are robust landscapes which are tolerant to change, such as the county's main urban and farming areas, which can accommodate development.

BLP-04 It is Council policy to protect and maintain the conservation value of all existing and future Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Nature

Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Biogenetic Reserves in the county.

BLP-20 It is Council policy to preserve riparian buffer strips free from development by reserving a minimum of 10 metres either side of all watercourses (measured from top of bank) with the full extent of the protection determined on a case-by-case basis by the Council, based on site specific characteristics and sensitivities.

BLP-21 It is Council policy to promote clear span bridging structures as the preferred option for culverts Any development proposal requiring culverting should also document stream habitat lost and provide compensatory habitat where possible. Realignment of water courses should incorporate stream enhancement measures, as outlined in Office of Public Works Environmental Guidance. The Council will consult with Inland Fisheries Ireland in relation to riparian and instream works as appropriate.

BLP-22 It is Council policy to promote the removal of historic culverts and infilling of watercourses.

BLP-23 It is Council policy to consider the Waterways Corridor Study 2002 and protect the recreational, educational and amenity potential of navigational and non-navigational waterways within the county, such as the Grand Canal Corridor, towpaths and adjacent wetland landscapes, taking into account more recent heritage and environmental legislation (including the SEA Directive) and environmental policy commitments.

BLP-30 It is Council policy to integrate the provision of green infrastructure with infrastructure provision and replacement, including walking and cycling routes, as appropriate, while protecting natural heritage.

BLO-04 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that the impact of development within or adjacent to national designated sites, Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Ramsar Sites and Nature Reserves likely to result in significant adverse effects on the designated site is assessed by requiring the submission of an Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by a suitably qualified professional, which should accompany planning applications.

BLO-12 It is an objective of the Council to maintain a riparian zone for larger and smaller river channels based on the Inland Fisheries Ireland updated guideline

document, 'Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment, a Guide to the Protection of Watercourses through the use of Buffer Zones, Sustainable Drainage Systems, Instream Rehabilitation, Climate / Flood Risk and Recreational Planning'.

BLO-17 It is an objective of the Council to encourage pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

BLO-18 It is an objective of the Council to encourage the retention, wherever possible, of hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatment in the county. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, provision of the same type of boundary will be required of similar length and set back within the site in advance of the commencement of construction works on the site (unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority).

Chapter 10 Built Heritage

BHP-22 It is Council policy to protect the industrial heritage of Offaly, including mills, historic industrial buildings, canals and historic bridges.

BHP-24 It is Council policy to protect and enhance the built and natural heritage of the Grand Canal and ensure that development within its vicinity is sensitively designed and does not have a detrimental effect on the character of the canal, its built elements and its natural heritage values and that it adheres to the Waterways Ireland's Heritage Plan 2016-2020.

BHP-27 It is Council policy to restrict vehicular access onto public roads that were formerly towpaths and any development permitted with access off a towpath must be screened effectively with trees and hedging. In relation to planning applications for housing in the open countryside with access proposed off towpaths, applicants must demonstrate compliance with Policy SSP-27 as towpaths are located within Natural Heritage Areas and Areas of High Amenity.

Chapter 11 Water Services and Environment

WSP-22 It is Council policy to ensure adequate surface water drainage systems are in place which meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan and to promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems.

6.5 Conclusion of policy context

The legislation and policy documents promote, and set targets for, transition to a low carbon, climate resilient society living in a biodiverse quality environment. The policy supports the development of associated infrastructure, including the development of the electricity transmission system, to support this transition, subject to environmental safeguards.

7 Heritage Designations

Nearest sites measured from the general location of the substation are:

- 0 km Proposed Natural Heritage Areas: Grand Canal 002104
- c.3km Proposed Natural Heritage Areas Murphy's Bridge Esker 001775
- c. 5km Natural Heritage Areas Daingean Bog 002033
- c.5.2km Proposed Natural Heritage Areas Raheenmore Bog 000582
- c.5.2km Special Area of Conservation Raheenmore Bog SAC 000582
- c.7km Special Area of Conservation Charleville Wood SAC 000571
- c.7.6 Proposed Natural Heritage Area Charleville Wood 000571
- c.12km Proposed Natural Heritage Area Clara Bog 000572
- c.12km Special Area of Conservation Clara Bog SAC

8 EIA

The proposed development of electrical substation and/or underground cabling is not a class for the purposes of EIA as 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 A of this report.

9 Planning Assessment

9.1 Context

Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the submissions received in relation to the application, and inspected the

site, I consider that the main issues in the planning assessment relate to the following matters:

- Principle of the development and planning policy.
- Landscape and visual impact.
- Biodiversity.
- Roads impacts.
- Hydrology and hydrogeology.
- Residential amenity.
- Other issues.

Issues in respect of appropriate assessment are addressed in section 10 of this report.

9.2 Principle of the development and planning policy

9.2.1 The site of the proposed substation is in an agricultural area adjacent to and within a permitted, but undeveloped solar farm. The proposed 110kV substation is in the location of and replaces a permitted 38kV substation. The proposed underground cable route is contained primarily within public roads.

9.2.2 Renewable energy projects are supported 'in principle' at national, regional and local policy levels, with the imperative at all policy levels being the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and combat climate change.

9.2.3 While not a renewable energy project in itself, the proposed development is ancillary to the permitted solar farm and necessary for its energisation and connection to the national grid.

9.2.4 In line with EU ambition, the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future commits to achieving a 51% reduction in Ireland's overall GHG emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050. National Policy (including the NPF First Revision April 2025 (NSO8 and NPO70), Climate Action Plan 2025 and Climate Action Plan 2024) include objectives to support proposals which aim to achieve a climate neutral economy.

- 9.2.5 I am satisfied that the proposed development would assist in delivering Regional Strategic Outcome No 9, of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midland Regional which seeks to pursue the potential for a more distributed renewables-focussed energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050.
- 9.2.6 I am also satisfied that the proposal would contribute to delivery of policy CAEP-01 and CAEP-05 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 which seek to facilitate the development, reinforcement, renewal and expansion of the electricity transmission and distribution grid including linkages for renewable energy to the grid.
- 9.2.7 The development of a 110kV electricity substation and grid connection for the permitted solar farms is supported at all levels of policy and is acceptable in principle.
- 9.2.8 The principle of Ballyteige and Derrygrogan solar farms including the 38kv substation in the location of the now proposed 110kV substation, have already been deemed acceptable by the Planning Authority and An Coimisiún. The proposed development, which is the enabling infrastructure necessary to connect the permitted solar farms to the grid, is also acceptable in principle, subject to planning considerations as set out below.

9.3 Landscape and visual impact.

- 9.3.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment report was undertaken by Neo environmental and submitted in support of the application. The LVIA report states that 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', 3rd Edition, 2013 (GLVIA3) was utilised in its preparation which I understand to represent current best practice. I have reviewed the LVIA and consider it adequately addresses the Landscape and Visual impact of the proposal.
- 9.3.2 I am satisfied that the underground cable route has no potential for operational phase landscape or visual impacts. The transient and short-term nature construction phase impacts are considered negligible and are for that reason given no further consideration regarding landscape or visual impact.

- 9.3.3 The site of the proposed 110kV substation is in an area of low landscape sensitivity, is reasonably well screened from public view has the benefit of boundaries defined with existing hedgerows. The Kilbeggan branch of the grand canal is in proximity of the substation and is classified as an area of high landscape sensitivity.
- 9.3.4 For the purpose of considering the landscape and Visual Impact I consider the proposed substation to be of permanent duration.
- 9.3.5 An existing 110Kv overhead electricity line is located and visible in the landscape approximately 100m west of the proposed substation.
- 9.3.6 There is a significant level of residential development in the wider area which represent potential sensitive receptors. Recreational users of the canal branch line for walking and cycling are also considered to be sensitive receptors in consideration of the visual impact of the substation on its own and in combination with other development in the vicinity including solar farms.
- 9.3.7 Due to intervening vegetation and landform, direct views of the proposed 110kV substation from nearby receptors are limited.
- 9.3.8 A series of viewpoints are presented in the LVIA to demonstrate the impact of the development on visual and landscape characteristics.
- 9.3.9 The impact from viewpoint 4 (adjacent to church and canal branch) and 5 (adjacent to canal branch to the north of viewpoint 4) are considered in the LVIA to be the most sensitive views leading to a moderate impact. On examination there appears to be an error in the presentation of figure 1.9 in the appendix to the LVIA viewpoint 4 as Year 1 and Year 5 demonstrating no change in hedgerow management. I consider the commitment to replace trees or hedgerows where possible to include the replacement of the 76 linear meters of poor-quality hedge northeast of the substation compound with a new hedgerow of native species indigenous to the area and that this should have been demonstrated in year 5 of viewpoint 4. I am satisfied that a condition requiring a clear proposal prior to commencement clarifying the planting of this hedgerow will address any ambiguity in this regard.

- 9.3.10 A detailed cumulative landscape and visual assessment is presented in the submitted LVIA. I am satisfied, notwithstanding the extensive nature of renewable energy and grid infrastructure, under development and proposed in the vicinity of the proposal, the cumulative impact will not exceed moderate-slight impact.
- 9.3.11 The submitted LVIA concludes that direct effects on landscape character and visual receptors are localised, are very low/negligible resulting in effects determined not to be significant.
- 9.3.12 I am satisfied that the landscape and visual impact of the proposal is as determined in the LVIA, falls within the carrying capacity of the local and wider landscape, is therefore acceptable and is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- 9.3.13 A condition requiring a final biodiversity management plan including planting and management of hedgerows will address any ambiguity regarding screening proposed to the east of the substation towards the canal.

9.4 Biodiversity

- 9.4.1 An ecological impact assessment (EclA) was prepared by Neo environmental and submitted in support of the application. The report states it was written by a named ecologist and conducted in line with relevant professional guidance and repeats much of the content of the project NIS. Field work was undertaken on 9th and 10th October 2024, which I consider to be late in the year for a quality survey.
- 9.4.2 A Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) is referenced as an Appendix to the EclA. The referenced appendix does not however contain the BMP and in its place, there is another copy of the EclA. I have confirmed this to be the case in both the paper and electronic copy of the application. I am satisfied that subject to an appropriately worded condition requiring agreement to a BMP within defined parameters that the absence of this document does not affect the assessment or recommendation contained in this report.

- 9.4.3 The main habitats within and surrounding the application boundary are agricultural grassland, hedgerow, waterbodies including drainage channels and the Kilbeggan branch of the Grand Canal.
- 9.4.4 There will be a direct loss of species poor grassland, this is a habitat abundant in the immediate and wider vicinity. Crossings, both above and below waterbodies including drains are proposed including by culverting and Horizontal directional Drilling (HDD). Hydrological connectivity via the Tullamore River has been identified to Charleville wood SAC.
- 9.4.5 The loss of 67 linear meters of hedgerow in the location of the substation construction compound is not acknowledged in the EclA, and no provision is made for compensatory planting. The removal of hedgerow for the construction/widening of the entrance from the public road and to address identified pinch points for access of the largest vehicles has not been referenced in the EclA. The applicant may have intended to address these points in the BMP. I am satisfied that the removal of these areas of hedgerow is acceptable in the context of the wider project. Where An Coimisiún are minded to grant permission compensation for removal and loss of associated biodiversity and landscape function can be addressed by means of a suitable boundary treatment/biodiversity enhancement condition.
- 9.4.6 Cumulative and combined effects are considered from section 2.193 of the submitted EclA report and concludes at para 2.222 that there are no likely significant cumulative effects arising.
- 9.4.7 Mitigation to protect biodiversity has been designed into the proposal with a 10m buffer along the Ballyteige Little stream, and 2m buffer from drains. How this buffer is to be protected during construction phase and treated during the operational phase has not been set out. I am satisfied that where An Coimisiún are minded to grant permission details of buffer zone protection measures can be addressed by way of condition.
- 9.4.8 Subject to a condition requiring a Biodiversity management plan I am satisfied that potential impacts on biodiversity are temporary, short term and typical of construction projects. With the mitigation measures proposed and conditioned I am satisfied that effects will not lead to any significant impact

and the project is consistent with the proper planning and development of the area.

9.5 Roads impacts

9.5.1 A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) was submitted in support of the application which addresses issues relating to construction of the substation. A separate preliminary Construction Traffic Management Plan (pCTMP) was submitted, in consideration of the cable route. An Outline Construction Methodology 110kV Grid Connection also addressed the construction phase of the underground cable and the road impacts thereof.

9.5.2 I have reviewed the traffic, roads and cable route construction plans and I am satisfied that they adequately describe the extent of, and impacts of works proposed on the baseline environment, and mitigation measures, as necessary.

9.5.3 I am satisfied that potential impacts on roads are temporary, short term and typical of construction projects of this type. Mitigation proposed includes close engagement and agreement with the Planning Authority. I am satisfied that effects will not lead to any significant impact and are consistent with the proper planning and development of the area.

9.5.4 Substation

9.5.5 The proposal includes temporary and permanent works to address constraints arising from the horizontal and vertical alignment of the local road network to facilitate access for the largest vehicles (carrying transformers) to the site. These works include the removal of hedgerow and poles, widening of the carriageway at pinch points and a reduction in gradient at the crest of public canal side road the L60051-1. The nature of these works is described in detail in the CTMP and associated drawings. The proposed entrance also provides construction access for the submitted solar farm and upgrade works are the subject of an existing consent.

9.5.6 A schedule of mitigation measures including pre and post condition survey, are generally of a standard nature to address the identified temporary

impacts and are set out in section 5.78 of the CTMP. I am satisfied that these are appropriate and will mitigate the identified impacts.

9.5.7 Cable Route

- 9.5.8 The proposed development includes excavation of public roads for installation of the grid connection cable along with joint bays. The local roads to be excavated are of a minor nature.
- 9.5.9 A detailed outline construction methodology of the 110kV grid connection route has been submitted as an appendix to the preliminary CTMP in support of the application. Section 12 sets out a list of guidelines and standards which informed the method statement. The construction methodology includes details for HDD crossing under the Corndarragh stream as well as for crossing each of the identified culverts and the open drains at the access to the substation site.
- 9.5.10 The plan includes details on working hours, temporary compounds, parking arrangements, site access control, traffic management measures, traffic routing, deliveries, enforcement, complaint management, staff movements and travel, drainage management as well as controls for noise, mud, and debris. Regular monitoring and reviews are planned, as are a suite of mitigation measures, to ensure the plan's effectiveness.
- 9.5.11 I am satisfied that potential impacts of the cable route are temporary, short term and typical of construction projects. With the mitigation proposed I am satisfied that effects will not lead to any significant impact and are consistent with the proper planning and development of the area.

9.6 Hydrology and hydrogeology

- 9.6.1 The proposed development includes excavation and crossing of water courses and drains for installation of the grid connection cable, the connecting cable to the Solar farm to east and for vehicular access to the substation site from the private road.
- 9.6.2 Concerns were raised that the construction works would pose a risk to the groundwater and for that reason to water supply in the area. The submission

expressed concern that hydrogeological assessment was lacking in the proposal.

- 9.6.3 In addition to the submitted flood risk and drainage impact assessment and consideration of the NIS, the submitted outline Construction and Environmental Management Plan oCEMP addresses hydrology and hydrogeology. Section 7.45 describes the hydrology, groundwater is addressed from section 7.50, water crossings at 7.89 and drainage management from 7.91.
- 9.6.4 I am satisfied that hydrology and hydrogeology including the concerns raised in the submission regarding water supply have been appropriately addressed. I am satisfied that no impacts of concern to hydrology and hydrogeology arise following implementation of measures which are of a standard nature and are incorporated into the design of the proposal. Further assessment of the water environment is set out in consideration of the water framework directive below.

9.7 Residential amenity

- 9.7.1 The application is supported by a range of reports which take address impacts on residential amenity. These include the CTMP and pCTMP, the outline construction methodology of the 110kV gird connection route, CEMP and LVIA. I am satisfied that potential impacts on residential amenity have been identified assessed and mitigation measures proposed in accordance with established best practice for projects of the nature proposed.
- 9.7.2 An Acoustic Impact Assessment (AIA) prepared in accordance with referenced national and international guidance has been submitted in support of the application. The AIA predicted maximum operational phase sound levels would be generated by the 2 no. 120 MVA transformers as received at residential sensitive receptors. Consideration was also given to cumulative effect of the substation with the 2 solar farms in immediate proximity. The model outputs found that noise limits recommended by the WHO were not breached for any of the receptors modelled for the operational phase.
- 9.7.3 Construction phase impacts were assessed with reference to o BS 5228-1:2009 Code of Practice for Noise and Vibration Control on Construction and

Open Sites. Mitigation measures for construction phase impacts are considered at section 5.2 of the AIA and are to be incorporated into the final CEMP.

- 9.7.4 Whilst acknowledging that there will be a construction phase impact on the amenity of residential property in the vicinity of the works arising from construction works including traffic generation, I am satisfied that with consideration of noise thresholds and other proposed mitigation measures set out in the AIA, CTMP, CEMP and elsewhere in the application the loss of residential amenity will not be of a magnitude and duration such that it is incompatible with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

9.8 Other issues

9.8.1 Oral Hearing

- 9.8.2 As noted in section 4.2 above an oral hearing was requested in a public submission.

- 9.8.3 The question of whether to hold an oral hearing was considered by An Coimisiún and it was decided 09 June 2026 that an oral hearing was not warranted, a copy of the decision is on file. The application has therefore been assessed based on the documentation submitted, the submissions on file and a site inspection.

9.8.4 Archaeology and Architectural Heritage

- 9.8.5 An Archaeology and Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment (AHIA) prepared by Neo Ltd was submitted in support of the application. This assessment identified no features of archaeological interest and addressed any potential direct impacts, through vibrations, ground stability or accidental damage by machinery, by locating cable trenches within the road verges furthest from each asset along the cable route. Indirect visual effects on protected structures were assessed using the ZTV and impacts were determined to be negligible. A detailed cumulative assessment of impacts is set out in the AHIA. I am satisfied that the Archaeological and architectural heritage impact has been adequately assessed, potential impacts identified

and mitigated by design and the recommendation that all groundworks associated with the preparation and construction of the substation be monitored by a qualified archaeologist during the construction stage.

9.8.6 I am satisfied that as no likely impacts on Archaeological or Architectural heritage have been identified in the submitted assessment of the proposal that a standard archaeological monitoring condition is adequate in this instance to address any unknown issues arising during construction.

9.8.7 PA recommended conditions

PA requested condition	Comment	Recommendation
In the event of a grant of permission, the mitigation measures contained in the submitted Natura Impact Statement (NIS) and Ecological Impact Assessment (ECIA) shall be implemented in full.	Standard condition	Use ACP standard condition
Prior to commencement of development, the developer shall submit to, and agree in writing with, the Planning Authority a schedule of these mitigation measures and monitoring commitments, and details of a time schedule for implementation of these. The results of the monitoring and reports arising shall be made available to the Planning Authority, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service		
All ground works associated with the proposed development shall be monitored under licence by a suitably qualified archaeologist. In the event that further archaeological material is found during the course of works, the work on the site shall be stopped pending a decision as to how best to deal with the archaeology. The developer shall be directed by the National Monuments Service with regard to any necessary mitigating action (e.g. preservation in situ, or excavation) and should facilitate the		

archaeologist in recording any material found.		
Prior to the commencement of works on the public roads, the Developer shall obtain a road opening license from Offaly County Council	Shall form part of the CEMP	Standard ACP CEMP condition
Prior to the commencement of works, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement with the Local Authority, details of cable installation including a works programme, construction details, cross-sections for each road showing location of trench in road and existing road width, existing services		
Where road closures are required to facilitate the permitted works, an application shall be submitted to the Local Authority, at least 8 weeks in advance of works commencing.	Road closures are not anticipated but cannot be ruled out. Shall form part of the CTMP and/or CEMP	Incorporate into CEMP and/or CTMP condition.
The Developer is required to submit for the written agreement with the Local Authority, traffic management plans for each stage of the works. in advance of works commencing	CTMP required	Incorporate into CEMP and/or CTMP condition.
Cables and joint bays to be located within the verge. except at road crossings, culvert crossings, or as agreed in writing with the Local Authority. prior to installation. Communications chambers to be located in the verge where possible	Joint bay final locations to be determined with ESB and OCC	Agreement of final location of Joint bays to be agreed with PA by condition
Prior to the commencement of works, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement with the Local Authority, pre-condition survey of cable routes, consisting of a video survey of the full route and photographs at every entrance and boundary structure. Any damage caused to the road or adjacent properties shall be repaired to its previous condition or, where this is	Pre-condition survey is part of the proposal.	Require as part of traffic management plan condition for clarity.

not possible, to an equivalent or better condition		
Pre-condition structural surveys on adjacent properties shall be carried out where necessary.	For agreement with the PA	Incorporate into CEMP condition
All works shall be in accordance with the Transport infrastructure Ireland Specification for Road Works unless otherwise specified	Deviations from TII specifications agreement required	Incorporate into CEMP condition
Reinstatement of the trench in local and regional roads shall be in accordance with the latest version of "Guidelines for the Opening, Backfilling and Reinstatement of Trenches in Public Roads" (The Purple Book), except where noted otherwise. Trench reinstatement in poor ground conditions may require special consideration and shall be agreed in writing with Local Authority prior to the commencement of works	Reinstatement details to be agreed.	Reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA to be conditioned.
After temporary reinstatement of the trench a full width overlay shall be provided on all local roads	Details to be agreed with PA	Reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA to be conditioned.
Where a full width overlay is provided, this shall consist of minimum 75mm AC 20 dense bit in accordance with Clause 906 of the Specification for Road Works and inverted double surface dressing (special application), designed and applied in accordance with IAT Guidelines for Surface Dressing in Ireland, Third Edition, or equivalent as agreed with Offaly County Council. Tie into existing entrances by regarding and surfacing with materials to match existing. Build up verges to new road level where required. Adequate drainage shall be provided where necessary at entrances. All works shall be to the satisfaction of the Local Authority	Details to be agreed with PA	Reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA to be conditioned.
Prior to the commencement of works, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement with the	Details to be agreed with PA	Reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA to be conditioned.

Local Authority, detail of all permanent restoration		
Ironworks shall be raised and reset as necessary and road markings and road studs reinstated to the satisfaction of the Local Authority	Details to be agreed with PA	Reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA to be conditioned.
Prior to the commencement of works, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement with the Local Authority, details of all existing crossings/bridges and designs indicating how these will be crossed	Details within the application any deviation to be agreed with PA	Survey and reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA
A defects liability period of 2 years shall apply. This shall commence when written notification has been given by the Developer to the Local Authority that the permanent reinstatement/overlay has been completed	Details to be agreed with PA	Survey and reinstatement details to the satisfaction of the PA
Prior to the commencement of works on the public roads, the Developer shall carry out a structural analysis of any existing culverts located on the L1024 & L1025. This analysis shall include a photographic record, record of specification, detailed measurements, structural conditions of the culvert and surrounding masonry channels etc., invert and crown levels at each side of the culvert and road levels for 25m each side of the culvert. The survey shall be carried out by a competent Structural Engineer. Any damage caused to the culvert during cable installation shall be repaired to its previous condition.	Details to be agreed with PA	Survey and reinstatement to the satisfaction of the PA
Prior to commencement of development, the developer shall lodge with the planning authority a cash deposit, a bond of an insurance company, or such other security as may be acceptable to the planning authority, to secure the reinstatement of public roads which may be damaged by the transport of	Standard condition	Apply ACP standard bond condition.

components to the site and the undergrounding of cabling, coupled with an agreement empowering the local authority to apply such security or part thereof to the satisfactory reinstatement of the public road. The form and amount of the security shall be as agreed in writing between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of agreement, shall be referred to An Coimisiún Pleanála for determination.		
All the existing conditions of the original planning file 21/98 must be adhered	Condition unnecessary	Unnecessary
All development work shall be carried out in accordance with Recommendations for Site Development Works for Housing Areas, DECLG, 1998		
Prior to construction commencing on site, the developer is requested to provide details of how effluent will be collected & treated during the construction phase. In the event that foul waste is to be removed regularly from site by a contractor during construction phase, the developer shall submit a signed maintenance contract with an Authorised Waste Collector and all foul waste must be transported to an Authorised Waste Facility.	Details provided in the application. Condition requiring compliance with other code unnecessary	Unnecessary
Surface water runoff from the roofs, roads and hardstanding areas shall be collected and disposed of within the site to soakaways or proposed attenuation overflowing to the adjacent watercourse. No such surface water run off shall be allowed to flow onto the public roadway or other adjoining properties; 2. Soakaways shall not be built within 5m of buildings, percolation areas, roads, etc. as per Section 1.5.8 of the Building Regulations	Details of surface water drainage and buffer protection zones provided in the application.	Include construction and post construction plan for Buffers in BMP.

2010, Technical Guidance Document H, Drainage and Waste Water Disposal. 3. The applicant shall maintain/preserve any existing riparian corridor/drain present within and/or adjacent to the site by implementing a buffer zone where no development is permitted in accordance with Offaly County Council's, Development Plan 2021-2027.		
All wastes arising from/at the proposed development shall be managed in accordance with the Waste Management Acts 1996 as amended. While awaiting removal, all waste materials shall be stored in designated areas protected against spillage or leachate run-off. 2. The applicant is required to obtain an Integrated Pollution Control licence from the EPA prior to any extraction/excavation of peat and any associated Works such as drainage. 3. All uncontaminated soil and stone imported onto the site shall comprise non-waste by-product, in accordance with Article 27 of the European Communities (Waste Directive) Regulations 2011, S.I. N6. 126 of 2011 4. No development shall commence prior to registration with the Environmental Protection Agency of the material to be imported onto the lands, in accordance with Article 27 of the European Communities (Waste Directive) Regulations 2011, S.I. Mo. 126 of 2011 5. Prior to commencement of development, details regarding the origin/source of proposed soil & stone to be imported onto the site shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Planning authority	Requirements of RWMP to be agreed with PA	Apply ACP standard Resource Waste Management Plan (RWMP) as part of CEMP condition for agreement with PA.

6. All mitigation measures as outlined in the submitted Resource & Waste Management Plan shall be implemented for the construction phase of the development		
Noise emissions at the nearest noise sensitive location (schools, places of worship or areas of high amenity) shall not exceed the following: L_{Aeq} (60 minutes) 55dB(A) 8am to 8pm L_{Aeq} (15 minutes) 45dB(A) 8pm to 8am 2. Audible tonal or impulsive components should be minimised at any noise sensitive location (such as dwellings): 3. The Applicant shall take reasonable measures to mitigate any environmental nuisance (noise and dust) which may arise during construction. Construction shall take place during working hours 7am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1.30pm Saturday unless otherwise authorised by the Planning Authority; 4. Dust suppression shall be undertaken under dry and windy conditions to ensure that dust deposition does not exceed 350mg/m²/day.	Measures for noise and dust control in the application.	Standard CEMP condition to address issues of construction generated dust and noise.
Apply a provided development contribution from Draft Offaly County Council Development Contribution Scheme 2026-2032 to any grant of permission for the proposed development	Development contributions inapplicable to S182 consent.	Do not apply
A calculated special contribution condition with a supporting calculation for works required to the local road network requested.		

10 Appropriate Assessment

10.1.1 AA screening and determination is set out in appendix B to this report.

10.1.2 In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that it is not possible to exclude that the proposed development alone will give rise to significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 in view of the sites conservation objectives. Appropriate Assessment is required.

10.1.3 This determination is based on:

- the nature of the proposal and the receiving environment
- potential qualitative and quantitative impacts on hydrology in the upstream catchment.
- COs of QI's relating to water quality and hydrological regime.

10.1.4 In screening the need for Appropriate Assessment, it was determined that the proposed development could result in significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 in view of the conservation objectives of those sites and that Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of S177V was required.

10.1.5 Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the NIS and all associated material submitted, I consider that adverse effects on site integrity of the Charleville Wood SAC 000571 can be excluded in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and that no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.

10.1.6 My conclusion is based on the following:

- Detailed assessment of construction and operational impacts.
- Water dependent features of the SAC and the relationships with the qualifying features.
- the proposed development will not affect the attainment of conservation objectives for Charleville Wood SAC 000571 or prevent or delay the restoration of favourable conservation condition for 91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*.
- Effectiveness of mitigation measures proposed.

11 Water Framework Directive

An assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken in accordance with Article 4 of the EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), as transposed by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003, as amended, and with regard to the Water Action Plan 2024: Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2022–2027.

The receiving water environment has been identified and assessed, see Appendix C. Having regard to the nature, scale, and location of the proposed development, and the mitigation measures incorporated into the design and conditioned, it is concluded that the proposed development will not:

- Result in deterioration of the ecological, chemical, or quantitative status of any relevant surface water or groundwater body;
- Increase pollutant loading or alter the hydrological regime of any receiving watercourse;
- Prevent or impede achievement of environmental objectives under the applicable River Basin Management Plan.

Any residual risks are capable of being addressed through the proposed mitigation measures, conditions, and through implementation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with the requirements of Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive.

12 Recommendation

Having regard to the foregoing, I recommend that permission for the proposed development be granted, subject to conditions, for the following reasons and considerations as outlined in the Draft Order below.

DRAFT ORDER

13 Reasons and Considerations

An Coimisiún 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 Networks Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2025) 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:

- a) European, national, regional and local planning, energy, climate and other policy of relevance, including in particular the following:
 - i. **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)
 - ii. **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).
 - iii. **Regional and Local Planning Policy**, including in particular:
 - Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019-2031

- Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027.
- (b) The location, nature, scale and layout of the proposed development and the pattern of development in the vicinity
- (c) The range of mitigation measures set out in the Natura Impact Statement.
- (d) The range of mitigation measures set out in the proposal including the
- Ecological Impact Assessment
 - Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan,
 - Preliminary Construction Traffic Management Plan,
 - Outline Construction Methodology 110kV Grid Connection
 - Archaeological and Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment
 - Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment
- (e) The submissions and observations received in relation to the application.
- (f) The Inspector's report and recommendation including the examination, analysis and evaluation undertaken in relation to appropriate assessment.

Appropriate Assessment Stage 1 Screening Determination

In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that it is not possible to exclude that the proposed development alone will give rise to significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 in view of the sites conservation objectives. Appropriate Assessment is required.

This determination is based on:

- the nature of the proposal and the receiving environment
- potential qualitative and quantitative impacts on hydrology in the upstream catchment.
- COs of QI's relating to water quality and hydrological regime.

Appropriate Assessment Stage 2 Conclusion

In screening the need for Appropriate Assessment, it was determined that the proposed development could result in significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC

000571 in view of the conservation objectives of those sites and that Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of S177V was required.

Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the NIS all associated material submitted, I consider that adverse effects on site integrity of the Charleville Wood SAC 000571 can be excluded in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and that no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.

My conclusion is based on the following:

- Detailed assessment of construction and operational impacts.
- Water dependent features of the SAC and the relationships with the qualifying features.
- the proposed development will not affect the attainment of conservation objectives for Charleville Wood SAC 000571 or prevent or delay the restoration of favourable conservation condition for 91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*.
- Effectiveness of mitigation measures proposed.

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 Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027, 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.

CONDITIONS

1. The proposed 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 commencement of development and the proposed development shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

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

Reason: Having regard to the nature of the development, An Coimisiún considers it appropriate to specify a period validity of the permission in excess of 5 years.

3. The mitigation measures contained in the submitted Natura Impact Statement shall be implemented in full.

Reason: To protect the integrity of European Sites.

4. Prior to commencement the developer shall submit and receive the written agreement of the Planning Authority a biodiversity Management Plan which shall include the location, extent and details of:

- a. planting and management of native species, indigenous to the area in replacement of hedgerows proposed for removal including the hedgerow to be removed to the east of the substation and as augmentation of hedgerows impacted by works.
- b. management of self-seeded, species rich native grassland in areas surrounding the proposed substation compound.
- c. Buffer zones for the protection from construction activities and post construction of hedgerows, trees, watercourses and drains.
- d. Details of other biodiversity enhancement measures proposed including bat boxes.

Reason: In the interests of clarity, protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the environment during the construction and operational phases of the development.

5. All of the environmental, construction and ecological mitigation measures, as set out in the Planning statement, Ecological Impact Assessment, Landscape

and Visual Impact Assessment, Archaeological and Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA), Construction Traffic Management Plan, Construction and Environmental Management Plan, Outline Construction Methodology 110kV Grid Connection, and other particulars submitted with the application, shall be implemented by the developer in conjunction with the timelines set out therein, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the conditions of this Order.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and of the protection of the environment during the construction and operational phases of the development.

6. Drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services and shall otherwise comply with submitted Flood Risk and Drainage assessment. A drainage management plan shall be developed for the construction and the operational phases of the development to include details of the proposed access routes and drains and is to be submitted to the planning authority for approval prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interests of environmental protection and flood prevention.

7. All road surfaces, culverts, watercourses, verges, 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 at the developer's expense. Prior to commencement of development, a condition survey of haul routes and the route of the underground electricity line and adjoining private entrances and boundary structures with structural surveys where necessary shall be carried out 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 protect the road network

8. Prior to the commencement of development, the developer shall comply with the transportation requirements of the planning authority for such works and services as appropriate. Such requirements shall require provision of a detailed Traffic Management Plan and shall include the following details:

- (a) Consultation with TII and all private and public companies and road authorities.
- (b) Any proposed deviations from TII Specification for Road Works
- (c) Final locations of joint bays as agreed with ESB and the Planning Authority.
- (d) Details of haulage routes, control measures for abnormally sized vehicles and an Abnormal Load Assessment.
- (e) Detailed arrangements for construction damage to be made good by the developer to the satisfaction of the planning authority.
- (f) Detailed arrangements for temporary traffic management/controls, to include arrangements for safe operation, and protocols to keep residents informed,
- (g) Construction Route Signage,
- (h) Road Opening Licences that will be required,
- (i) Arrangements for the phasing of the development and any concurrent or sequential phase of the associated Solar Farms and cabling in the public road to connect these or other solar farms to the sub-station.
- (j) Detailed design of the temporary and permanent works proposed to the public road and site entrance, to the satisfaction of the planning authority and recessed entrance gate.

Reason: In the interest of traffic and pedestrian safety.

9. Prior to commencement of development, a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) for the construction phase shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority, generally in accordance with the Outline Construction Methodology submitted with the application. The CEMP shall incorporate the following:
 - (a) a detailed plan for the construction phase incorporating, inter alia, road condition and structural surveys, construction programme, supervisory measures, noise, vibration, dust and surface water management measures including appointment of a site noise liaison officer, construction hours and the management, transport and disposal of construction waste. This shall address any concurrent construction phase of projects in the area.

- (b) a comprehensive programme for the implementation of all monitoring commitments made in the application and supporting documentation during the construction period.
- (c) an Invasive Species Eradication and Management Strategy for the site, to include monitoring post completion of works.
- (d) a Resource Waste Management Plan (RWMP) as set out in the EPA's Best Practice Guidelines for the Preparation of Resource and Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects (2021)
- (e) an emergency response plan
- (f) proposals in relation to public information and communication. A record of daily checks that the works are being undertaken in accordance with the Construction Environmental Management Plan shall be kept for inspection by the planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and orderly development.

10. The developer shall engage a suitably qualified archaeologist to monitor (licensed under the National Monuments Acts) all site clearance works; topsoil stripping or groundworks associated with the development of the substation. Prior to the commencement of such works the archaeologist shall consult with and forward to the Local Authority archaeologist or the NMS as appropriate a method statement for written agreement. The method statement shall describe the use of appropriate tools and/or machinery to ensure the preservation and recording of any surviving archaeological remains shall be necessary. Should archaeological remains be identified during archaeological monitoring, all works shall cease in the area of archaeological interest pending a decision of the planning authority, in consultation with the National Monuments Service, regarding appropriate mitigation. The developer shall facilitate the archaeologist in recording any remains identified. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified by the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments Service, shall be complied with by the developer. Following the completion of all archaeological work on site and any necessary post-excavation specialist analysis, the planning authority and the National Monuments Service shall be furnished with a final archaeological

report describing the results of the monitoring and any subsequent required archaeological investigative work/excavation required. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the developer.

Reason: To ensure the continued preservation of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest

11. The developer shall comply with the following requirements:

- (a) No additional artificial lighting shall be installed or operated on site unless authorised by a prior grant of planning permission.
- (b) Cables within the site shall be located underground.
- (c) External finishes to fencing, gates and exposed metalwork (non-galvanised/subject to EirGrid requirements), roof and external walls of substation, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of clarity, of visual and residential amenity.

12. Prior to the commencement of development, details of CCTV cameras shall be submitted to the planning authority for written agreement. These shall be fixed and angled to face into the site and shall not be directed towards adjoining property or roads.

Reason: In the interest of clarity, of visual and residential amenity.

13. Prior to commencement of development, the developer shall lodge with the planning authority a cash deposit, a bond of an insurance company, or such other security as may be acceptable to the planning authority, to secure the reinstatement of public roads which may be damaged by construction and/or the transport of materials to the site, coupled with an agreement empowering the planning authority to apply such security or part thereof to the satisfactory reinstatement of the public road. 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 Coimisiún Pleanála for determination.

Reason: In the interest of traffic safety and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

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 me, directly or indirectly, following my professional assessment and recommendation set out in my report in an improper or inappropriate way.

Hugh O'Neill

Planning Inspector

23 June 2026

Appendix A EIA pre-screening

Form 1 - EIA Pre-Screening

Case Reference	ACP-323988-26
Proposed Development Summary	110kV substation and c. 7.5km of underground cable grid connection to the existing Thornberry 110kV substation.
Development Address	Located at Ballyteige Little, Co. Offaly
	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? (For the purposes of the Directive, "Project" means: - The execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes, - Other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources)	☒ Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2. ☐ 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)?	
☐ Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1.	State the Class here
☒ 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?	
☒ 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.	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.

☐ Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold.	N/A
☐ Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold.	N/A

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 ☐	
No ☒	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3)

Appendix B Appropriate Assessment

Standard AA Screening Determination Template

Test for likely significant effects

Screening for Appropriate Assessment	
Test for likely significant effects	
Step 1: Description of the project and local site characteristics.	
Brief description of project	110kV substation and c. 7.5km of underground cable grid connection to the existing Thornberry 110kV substation a more detailed description of the project is set out in section 3 of the inspector's report.
Brief description of development site characteristics and potential impact mechanisms	The site extends in total to 11.2 ha. Consisting of improved agricultural grassland, private laneways and public roadways. The cable crossings are proposed by HDD to waterbody TULLAMORE_030 and the canal branch line pNHA. Culverting of drains is proposed for vehicular and cable access to the proposed substation.
Screening report	Y
Natura Impact Statement	Y
Relevant submissions	A single third part submission was received and described in a general way concerns that the submitted NIS is inadequate to comply with A.6(3) of Habitats Directive. The submission also set out general concerns without addressing specifics potential for the project to impact on wetlands, boglands, hedgerows and woodlands.

No submissions received from prescribed bodies.				
Step 2. Identification of relevant European sites using the Source-pathway-receptor model The AA screening presented in section 5 of Volume 1 titled NIS presents table 5.1 setting out the 6 Special Areas of Conservation and 2 Ramsar sites along with their Qualifying Features that fall within a 15km radius of the proposal with a determination of potential connectivity. A more relevant list that falls into the Zone of Influence is set out below.				
European Site (code)	Qualifying interests ¹ Link to conservation objectives (NPWS, date)	Distance from proposed development (km)	Ecological connections ²	Consider further in screening ³ Y/N
000571 Charleville Wood SAC	1016 91E0 Desmoulin's Whorl Snail Vertigo moulinsiana Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) * CO000571.pdf	5.74km straight line distance from cable crossing of Tullamore River tributary. 7.37km straight line distance from site of proposed substation. c. 8.24km of EPA mapped water course Tullamore 30 from substation site.	Potential hydrological/ ecological connection via surface water body.	Y

Raheenmore Bog SAC 000582	7110 7120 7150 Active raised bogs Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion. ConservationObjectives.rdl	C5km from proposed substation	None	N
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Step 3. Describe the likely effects of the project (if any, alone or in combination) on European Sites

The submitted screening has included potential for ecological connectivity with the river Barrow and Nore SAC I have screened this potential out at ZOI determination stage.

AA Screening matrix

Site name Qualifying interests	Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site*	
	Impacts	Effects
Charleville Wood SAC 000571 1016 Desmoulin's Whorl Snail Vertigo moulinsiana 91E0 Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) *	Direct: Construction phase pollution/contamination and/or siltation of upstream surface waterbodies impacts on QI species Changes to hydrological regime by alteration to catchment and/or upstream, waterbody Indirect: Construction phase pollution/contamination of upstream surface waterbodies impacting on supporting habitats or species for QI species. Introduction of invasive aquatic species to the waterbody	Examples: Changes to habitat quality/function Habitat loss/ modification undermine conservation objectives related to water quality and/or hydrological regime. Displacement of habitat by invasive spp. Possibility of significant effects cannot be ruled out without further analysis and assessment

	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): Y
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects?
	Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site*
Step 4 Conclude if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects on a European site	
It is not possible to exclude the possibility that proposed development alone would result significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 from effects associated with changes to QI and other habitats supporting QI's resulting from works proposed. An appropriate assessment is required on the basis of the possible effects of the project 'alone'. Further assessment in-combination with other plans and projects is not required at screening stage.	

Screening Determination

Significant effects cannot be excluded

In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that it is not possible to exclude that the proposed development alone will give rise to significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 in view of the sites conservation objectives. Appropriate Assessment is required.

This determination is based on:

- the nature of the proposal and the receiving environment
- potential qualitative and quantitative impacts on hydrology in the upstream catchment.
- Co's of QI's relating to water quality and hydrological regime.

Template 3: Standard AA Template and AA Determination

Appropriate Assessment

The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to appropriate assessment of a project under part XAB, sections 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) are considered fully in this section.

Taking account of the preceding screening determination, the following is an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed development of the 110kV substation and c. 7.5km of underground cable grid connection to the existing Thornberry 110kV substation in view of the relevant conservation objectives of Charleville Wood SAC 000571 based on scientific information including that provided by the applicant.

The information relied upon includes the following:

- Natura Impact Statement prepared by Neo environmental Ltd.
- Conservation objectives published by NPWS for Charleville Wood SAC
- EPA and OPW online water mapping.

I am satisfied that the information provided is adequate to allow for Appropriate Assessment. I am satisfied that all aspects of the project which could result in significant effects are considered and assessed in the NIS and mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce any adverse effects on site integrity are included and assessed for effectiveness.

Submissions/observations

A single third part submission was received and described in a general way concerns that the submitted NIS is inadequate to comply with A.6(3) of Habitats Directive. The submission also set out general concerns without addressing specifics potential for the project to impact on wetlands, boglands, hedgerows and woodlands.

No submissions received from prescribed bodies or other relevant organisations.

NAME OF SAC/ SPA (SITE CODE): Charleville Wood SAC 000571

Summary of Key issues that could give rise to adverse effects (from screening stage):

- i. Construction phase pollution/contamination and/or siltation of upstream surface waterbodies
- ii. Changes to hydrological regime by alteration to catchment and/or upstream, waterbody

iii. Construction phase pollution/contamination of upstream surface waterbodies impacting on supporting habitats or species for QI species. iv. Introduction of invasive aquatic species to the waterbody See paragraphs 6.17 to 6.28 of the submitted NIS			
Qualifying Interest features likely to be affected	Conservation Objectives Targets and attributes (summary-inserted)	Potential adverse effects	Mitigation measures (summary) NIS sections 6.88-6.124
91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) *	Restore favourable conservation condition	Changes to habitat quality/ function resulting in Habitat loss/ modification undermining conservation objectives related to water quality and/or hydrological regime. Displacement / modification of habitat by invasive spp	Best practice pollution control measures Buffers to water bodies including drains. Application of industry standard controls, CEMP, Drainage management plan Supervision and monitoring including by ECOW.
1016 Desmoulin's Whorl Snail <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>	Maintain favourable conservation condition	Changes to habitat quality/ function resulting in Habitat loss/ modification undermining conservation objectives related to water quality and/or hydrological regime Displacement / modification of habitat by invasive spp	

The above table is based on the documentation and information provided on the file and I am satisfied that the submitted NIS has identified the relevant attributes and targets of the Qualifying Interests.	
Assessment of issues that could give rise to adverse effects view of conservation objectives. Examples: (i) Water quality degradation Run from contaminants including particulate matter during construction. Mitigation measures and conditions Buffers to waterbodies, SUDS, drainage management plan, CEMP, monitoring, best practice pollution control measures and application of industry standards. (iii) Spread of invasive species Instruction and/or distribution of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species downstream to the SAC. Mitigation measures and conditions Buffers to waterbodies, drainage management plan, CEMP, monitoring, best practice pollution control measures and application of industry standards.	
In-combination effects I am satisfied that in-combination effects has been assessed comprehensively and adequately in section the NIS in section 6.127 to 6.180. The applicant has demonstrated satisfactorily that no significant residual effects will remain post the application of mitigation measures and there is therefore no potential for in-combination effects. In addition, plans and projects that could act in combination with the proposed development are detailed and assessed in the NIS. I reviewed this list and checked the planning register for updates, and I am satisfied that the potential for cumulative effects has been carefully considered and discounted.	
Findings and conclusions The applicant determined that following the implementation of mitigation measures the construction and operation of the proposed development alone, or in combination with other plans and projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of this European site.	

Based on the information provided, I am satisfied that adverse effects arising from aspects of the proposed development can be excluded for the European sites considered in the appropriate Assessment. No direct impacts are predicted. Indirect effects are mitigated by measures described to prevent impacts on water quality. Monitoring measures are also proposed to ensure compliance and effective management of measures. I am satisfied that the mitigation measures proposed to prevent adverse effects have been assessed as effective and can be implemented.

Site Integrity

The proposed development will not affect the attainment of the Conservation objectives of the Charleville Wood SAC 000571. Adverse effects on site integrity can be excluded and no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.

Appropriate Assessment Conclusion: Integrity Test

In screening the need for Appropriate Assessment, it was determined that the proposed development could result in significant effects on Charleville Wood SAC 000571 in view of the conservation objectives of those sites and that Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of S177V was required.

Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the NIS all associated material submitted, I consider that adverse effects on site integrity of the Charleville Wood SAC 000571 can be excluded in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and that no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.

My conclusion is based on the following:

- Detailed assessment of construction and operational impacts.
- Water dependent features of the SAC and the relationships with the qualifying features.
- the proposed development will not affect the attainment of conservation objectives for Charleville Wood SAC 000571 or prevent or delay the restoration of favourable conservation condition for 91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*.
- Effectiveness of mitigation measures proposed.

Appendix C Water Framework Directive

WFD IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCOPING TABLE			
Step 1: Nature of the Project, the Site and Locality			
An Coimisiún Pleanála ref. no.	ACP-323988-26	Townland, address	Ballyteige Little, Co. Offaly
Description of project		110kV substation and c. 7.5km of underground cable grid connection to the existing Thornberry 110kV substation a more detailed description of the project is set out in section 3 of the inspector's report.	
Brief site description, relevant to WFD Screening,		The site extends in total to 11.2 ha. Consisting of improved agricultural grassland, private laneways and public roadways. The cable crossings are proposed by HDD to waterbody TULLAMORE_030 and the canal branch line pNHA. Culverting of drains is proposed for vehicular and cable access to the proposed substation	
Proposed surface water details		Substation surface water to drain to soak pits via interceptors and rainwater storage/attenuation tank.	
Proposed water supply source & available capacity		N/A	
Proposed wastewater treatment system & available capacity, other issues		N/A	
Others?			

Step 2: Identification of relevant water bodies and Step 3: S-P-R connection

Identified water body	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) (Consider all phases)	Mitigation Measures proposed	Is mitigation sufficient? Will there be any residual impacts?
River	TULLAMORE_030 IE_SH_25T030300	Poor	At risk	Ag UR	Surface run off during construction	Best practice pollution control measures Buffers to water bodies including drains. Application of industry standard controls, CEMP, Drainage management plan Supervision and monitoring	Yes

						including by ECOW.	
Groundwater body	Geashill IE_SH_G_103	Good	Not at risk	None listed	Pollution due to accidental discharge to groundwater r	Best practice pollution control measures Applicatio n of industry standard controls, CEMP, Drainage managem ent plan Supervisio n and monitoring including by ECOW.	Yes