

An
Bord
Pleanála

Memorandum ABP-316051-23

To: The Board
Cc. Stephen Kay, ADP
From: Una O'Neill, SPI
Re: ABP-316051-23
Date: 30.11.23

1.0 Site Location and Description

This proposed development of a wind farm is located on green field agricultural lands, c. 2km southwest of Ballymore, c. 6km north of Moate and c. 12km east of Athlone in Co. Westmeath.

2.0 Proposed Development

A ten year planning permission is sought for the following:

- 9 No. wind turbines with an overall ground-to-blade tip height of 185 metres; a rotor blade diameter of 162 metres; and hub height of 104 metres, and associated foundations and hard-standing areas;
- A thirty-year operational life from the date of full commissioning of the wind farm and subsequent decommissioning;
- A meteorological mast with a height of 30 metres, and associated foundation and hard-standing area;

- Junction accommodation works and temporary access roads to facilitate turbine delivery to an existing entrance on L5365;
- Upgrade of existing entrance on L5363 for provision of site entrance;
- Upgrade of existing tracks/roads and provision of new site access roads, junctions and hardstand areas;
- All underground electrical (33kV) and communication cabling;
- A temporary construction compound;
- Spoil Management;
- Site Drainage;
- Tree Felling;
- Operational stage site signage; and
- All ancillary works and apparatus

- 2.1. For the purposes of this EIAR the wind turbine model selected is proposed to have an output of 6.2MW, with a combined generating capacity of 55.8MW.
- 2.2. The Grid Connection will be subject to a separate planning application. It will include a 110kV on-site substation compound (2 no. control buildings with welfare facilities, all associated electrical plant and apparatus, security fencing, underground cabling, waste water holding tank, site drainage and all ancillary works), a temporary construction compound and approximately 31km of underground 110kV electrical cabling connecting the proposed on-site substation to the existing Thornsberry 110kV substation, near Tullamore, Co. Offaly.
- 2.3. An EIAR and NIS accompanies the application.

3.0 Planning History

ABP-313352-22 – Pre-application consultation with ABP in relation to proposed development of a 110kV substation and grid connection cabling from a proposed wind farm site to the existing Thornsberry 110kV substation in County Offaly, approx. 29km south of the proposed wind farm.

The Board decided that the proposed development falls within the scope of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

4.0 Submissions – Prescribed Bodies

In summary:

- **Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage: Archaeology**
 - Deficiencies in the overall methodology and scope of the AIA in relation to the Hill of Uisneach; lack of reference to relevant guidance of 'Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context' (UNESCO) and 'Guidance for Wind Energy Projects in a World Heritage Context' (UNESCO); limitations in the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment in relation to the Hill of Uisneach.
- **Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage: Development Applications Unit**
 - Issues with the methodology to determine the magnitude of the impacts on a given population of birds.
 - Hen Harrier – not recorded within the collision risk zone. However, the NPWS recorded a nesting site within 5km of the proposed development, which constitutes a rare example of lowland nesting site for this species. 5km is within the foraging range for males during the breeding season. Further targeted surveys may be of benefit.
 - Barn Owl – these were not recorded during the surveys undertaken to inform the EIAR. The NPWS has records for two active barn owl nests in the vicinity of the application site boundary and may occur within the application site boundary. Clarity is required as to whether this species was specifically targeted during the surveys undertaken. Further surveys targeting this species may be necessary. The Dept reminds ABP of their obligations under Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive.
- **Office of Public Works**
 - The Hill of Uisneach contains National Monument no. 155, consisting of two monuments, the 'Cat Stone' and its surrounding embankment enclosure (a ring barrow) and a near by ringfort.
 - The Hill of Uisneach is part of a serial entry on the World Heritage Tentative List. The OPW has concerns that the development as proposed may have a negative impact on the setting of, significance of, and views from, and to, the National Monument. In particular the OPW has

concerns about the impact on the OUV (Outstanding Universal Value) of the site.

- While acknowledging the access difficulties of the applicant's team, the assessment of impact on the significance of the Hill of Uisneach is inadequate, considering the degree of protection afforded by the Westmeath CDP and the Hill's World Heritage Tentative List status.

- **Transportation Infrastructure Ireland**

- No details in the EIAR in relation to abnormal 'weight' loads.
- No technical load assessment of structures appear to have been undertaken in support of the application. It is acknowledged that abnormal weights may not be a feature of the development.
- Impact of maintaining traffic flows along the N52 during construction has not been considered in any great detail in the EIAR.
- TII considers the proposed to lay high voltage cabling in the N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Scheme constraints study area prior to the finalisation of the proposed preferred route corridor for the N52 works is premature.
- TII recommends an alternative grid connection proposal is prepared.

5.0 **Submissions - Third Party Observations**

- Impact on national monument of Hill of Uisneach.
- Impact on residential amenity – visual impact, noise, shadow flicker.
- Contrary to policy CPO10.145 of the County Development Plan to strictly direct large-scale energy production projects, in the form of wind farms, onto cutover cutaway peatlands in the County
- Impact on health.
- Impact on local road network during construction.
- Suitability of this low lying landscape which is designated as having a low average wind speed in the SEAI wind atlas.

6.0 **Need for Oral Hearing**

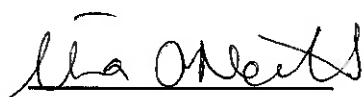
Having regard to:

- The information provided by the applicant including the EIAR

- The submissions received to date from prescribed bodies and observers

I do not consider that the issues arising would warrant the holding of an oral hearing and I submit that the documentation on file can be readily assessed by way of the written submissions. I would also submit that the convening of a hearing would not be likely to elicit new information that would assist in the understanding or proper assessment of the proposed development.

I therefore recommend that the oral hearing is not held in this instance.



Una O'Neill

Inspectorate

30th November 2023

Agreed.
Stephen King
30.11.2023.