

## ***Miontuairiscí / Meeting Minutes***

### ***Ordinary Meeting***

***12<sup>th</sup> June 2023 @ 1.30p.m.***

***Buvinda House, Navan (and online via zoom)***

#### **Presiding**

An Cathaoirleach, Councillor Tommy Reilly

#### **Councillors Present:**

Councillors Joseph Bonner, Mike Bray, Eugene Cassidy, Francis Deane, Aisling Dempsey, Brian Fitzgerald, Pádraig Fitzsimons, Joe Fox, Noel French, Michael Gallagher, David Gilroy, Trevor Golden, Wayne Harding, Suzanne Jamal, Geraldine Keogan, Nick Killian, Alan Lawes, Paul McCabe, Elaine McGinty, Stephen McKee, Paddy Meade, Maria Murphy, Gerry O'Connor, Damien O'Reilly, Sarah Reilly, Amanda Smith, Emer Tóibín, Sharon Tolan, Gillian Toole.

#### **Councillors Present via Zoom:**

Councillors Yemi Adenuga, Tom Behan, Sean Drew, Eddie Fennessy, Deirdre Geraghty-Smith, Ronan Moore, Aisling O'Neill, Niamh Souhan, Alan Tobin.

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors Conor Tormey

#### **Officials in attendance:**

**Chief Executive:** Fiona Lawless

**Directors of Service:** Des Foley, Barry Lynch, Dara McGowan, Martin Murray

**A/Director of Service:** Sheila Harkin

**Meetings Administrator:** Elaine Daly

### **5.5 Planning**

- 5.5.1 To receive the Chief Executive's Report in accordance with Section 37E(4) of the Planning and Development Acts, in relation to a Strategic Infrastructure Development application made to An Bord Pleanála, reference ABP-316212-23, for proposed development of 26 wind turbines and associated works at the Ballivor Bog Group, County Meath and County Westmeath. (separate attachment)

An Cathaoirleach welcomed Ms. Teresa O'Reilly, Executive Planner to the meeting. He also advised the Elected Members that any specific points that they would like appended to the report should be emailed to the Meetings Administrator on/before 5.00pm, Tuesday June 13, 2023, to ensure accuracy of the information provided.

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Ms. O'Reilly gave a detailed presentation in respect of the proposed development by Bord na Mona Powergen Ltd (within the administrative boundary of Co. Meath) Reference no. ABP-316212-23, the subject of the Chief Executive's Report to An Bord Pleanála of June 2023.

There were interventions from **Councillors Noel French; Joe Fox; Gillian O'Toole; Paul McCabe; Elaine McGinty; Emer Tóibín** and **Trevor Golden**. Matters raised included the following:

- Agree with recommendation for request for further information.
- Absence of updated guidelines on wind farms has a negative impact in ensuring proper planning and ensuring appropriate distance between turbines and local residences. Technology has also moved on and the Guidelines should reflect this progression.
- Lands are/ may be more suitable to a solar farm development.
- Proximity of turbines to residential properties is an issue. Turbines should be located as far away as possible from such properties. Additional lands could be used to provide a greater buffer for residents or assurances that there are no other options (excluding cost).
- Importance of a Decommissioning Plan being agreed to protect the landscape and whether remediation of the site will fall to the Council if the developer no longer owns the site.
- Concern of residents with respect to the devaluing of their properties could be alleviated by excellent community amenities.
- A community fund is required to assist local people. Details with regards to community benefits/amenities should be included and conditioned as part of any grant of permission.
- In addition to proposed paths and cycleways, horse tracks, a natural play park, sensory garden, waymarked posts, orientation information boards and toilets should be provided.
- Potential challenge to the wind farm indicated in local media.
- How the neighbouring and approved wind farm was considered in the assessment of the proposed one and how would both sites contribute to targets?
- Will the proposed development prevent parts of the bog from taking part in the Peatland Climate Action Scheme (PCAS), specifically the rewetting element, and if so, what percentage of the bog will be prevented from taking part in this element of the scheme.
- What consideration was given to solar renewable energy in this project to reduce the number of wind turbines, particularly close to existing homes?

Responses to queries were provided by Ms. O'Reilly.

Following the meeting, the following submissions were received by email:

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### **Cllr Joe Fox:**

I wish to make the following submission to the Chief Executive's Report on the proposed Ballivor Wind Farm.

- (1) The absence of updated planning guidelines on wind farms is a major handicap to proper planning and to ensure turbines are a proper distance from any dwelling.
- (2) The lands in question are mostly cutaway boglands which in my opinion would be more suited to a solar farm.
- (3) These lands were acquired by Bord na Mona from mostly small landowners and householders for nominal sums and by CPO. Therefore it would be only just that a proper Community Fund be made a condition if any planning is granted.

### **Cllr. Aisling Dempsey:**

First and foremost, I would like to commend the Council on their comprehensive assessment of the application. I would wholeheartedly agree with many of the queries and concerns raised therein. And I am very glad to see further information requested and indeed proposed planning conditions suggested.

Most notably, I would like to ensure that BnM have located in particular the 10 turbines in the Meath area as far as possible from residential properties. I would like their full assurances that there are no other options. I do not accept cost as a reason to locate close to housing.

I would like to see more detail around the community benefits/amenities that will be included here. I note the mention of paths and cycleways, what about horse tracks? What about a natural play park and/or sensory garden? Waymarker posts and orientation info boards? Toilets? Many residents are concerned about the cost of their homes being reduced due to proximity to a wind farm. Excellent community amenities may alleviate some of this.

### **Cllr. Ronan Moore**

Under the Peatland Climate Action Scheme (PCAS), peatland rehabilitation will be undertaken in selected bogs across the Bord na Móna bog group. This scheme is a form of enhanced and accelerated peatland rehabilitation which will encourage bog rewetting, thus rehabilitating the peat bogs by putting existing peatland environments on a path back to them becoming naturally functioning peatlands. This is a vital element of helping us as a country to achieve our climate targets as well as safeguarding against bog fires that are expected to increase as the climate warms. Will the proposed development prevent parts of the bog from taking part in the PCAS, specifically the rewetting element, and if so, what percentage of the bog will be prevented from taking part in this element of PCAS due to the proposed development?

Though renewable wind energy, on a yearly average and per acre, currently produces more energy

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than solar renewable energy, the gap between the two continues to narrow. What level of conversations and analysis was done to integrate solar renewable schemes in this project, thus negating the number of wind turbines proposed, particularly in those areas closer to existing homes?