

An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Record of 1st Meeting ABP-323201-25

Case Reference / Description	Proposed development of a 220kV 'loop in/ loop out' substation and grid connection to serve a proposed solar farm development located in the lands to the West and South of Hospital Village and the Northwest of Knocklong Village in East County Limerick.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Date	14/10/2025	Start Time	11:30am
Location	Virtually	End Time	12:15pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning, Chair
Barry O'Donnell, Senior Planning Inspector
Sinead White, Executive Officer

Representing the Prospective Applicant
William Leech
Steve McCarthy
Emma-Lisa Knudsen
Ed Barrett
Meabh Cleary

Introduction

The Commission referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 25th July 2025, requesting pre-application consultations under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Commission; it also invited the prospective applicant to outline the nature of the proposed development and to highlight any matters that it wished to receive advice on from the Commission.

The Commission's representatives mentioned the following general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process:

- The Commission will keep a record of this meeting and any other meetings, if held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process. The record of the meeting will not be amended by the Commission once finalised, but the prospective applicant may submit comments on the record which will form part of the case file.
- It is not permitted to record this meeting in any way. The only record of the meeting will be the record you will receive from the Commission following this meeting.
- The Commission will serve notice at the conclusion of the process as to the strategic infrastructure status of the proposed development. It may form a preliminary view at an early stage in the process on the matter.
- A further meeting or meetings may be held in respect of the proposed development.
- Further information may be requested by the Commission and public consultations may also be directed by the Commission.
- The Commission may hold consultations in respect of the proposed development with other bodies.

The holding of consultations does not prejudice the Commission in any way and cannot be relied upon in the formal planning process or in any legal proceedings.

Presentation made by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant's presentation, which is attached to the file, set out the following:

1. Introductions
2. Project Background
3. Project Elements
4. Planning & Regulatory Context
5. Key Planning Considerations
6. Next Steps

The development is intended to facilitate the connection of a proposed solar farm development to the grid. The status of the solar farm development is that it is intended to submit an application to Limerick City and County Council in the near future. The solar farm development is proposed to be undertaken in partnership with ESB solar.

The proposed development is a 220kV loop in/loop out substation, which will connect to the grid via the existing 220kV overhead lines. Two site options for the development were outlined as follows:

Option 1 comprises construction of the proposed substation on a site to the south of Hospital, accessed from the L1509.

Option 2 comprises construction of the proposed substation on a site to the north-west of Knocklong, accessed via a farm track.

The prospective applicant stated that while two options for the grid connection were being presented in this pre application consultation, it was intended that only one would be brought forward to an application.

The prospective applicant presented some information on the planning and legislative context of the application. It was noted that the current pre application consultation is under s.182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000. It was also noted that under the Planning and Development Act 2024 it would be the case that a single application for the entire project could be submitted to the Commission for consideration.

The prospective applicants stated that it was their intention to submit an application in Q1 2026.

Discussion:

- The Commission's representatives began the discussion by querying the nature of the pre-application submission, which outlines 2 separate development options and which advises that only 1 option will be brought forward as part of a future planning application. They advised that the Commission will only be in a position to issue a determination on 1 development proposal and that this should be clarified prior to closure of the consultation. The prospective applicant informed the meeting that the issue will likely be resolved in the coming weeks and at this time option 1 is looking the most likely.
- The Commission's representative offered a preliminary view that, on the basis the characteristics of the proposed substation, it is likely to be considered to constitute strategic infrastructure development. A formal determination on this will be made by the Commission, following receipt of a closure request.

- The Commission's representatives advised the prospective applicant that the best course of action is to keep the pre-application consultation open until such time as the preferred development option is confirmed and, at the time of closure, to inform the Commission of which option has been selected. The Commission's representatives also reminded the prospective applicant that design flexibility can be sought while the consultation remains open.
- Regarding the functional connection between the proposed substation and a proposed solar farm that will be the subject of an application by the prospective applicant to the local authority, the Commission's representatives advised of the need to be conscious of the issue of prematurity as part of an application in the event that separate applications are made for the solar farm (to the PA in the first instance) and the grid connection (to ACP). The prospective applicant clarified that the proposed grid connection development is intended to serve the proposed solar farm, but that it will be taken over by Eirgrid after construction of the solar farm and that it will be capable of wider operational usage into the future.
- The Commission's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide robust planning justification for the proposed development, where both option sites are located on unzoned lands.
- The Commission's representatives noted that site option 2 is restricted in relation to access and that requirements for site access and any road upgrades or improvements should be discussed with the local authority.
- The Commission's representatives advised the prospective applicant that the Option 1 site is partly located within a flood zone and that any application should be accompanied by a flood risk assessment.

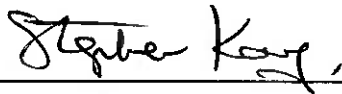
- In terms of EIA Screening, noting that the proposed development would not itself constitute a class for the purposes of EIA, the Commission's representatives outlined the consideration required in respect of rural restructuring and hedgerow removal.
- The Commission's representatives noted that Glen Bog is within c.5.5km north-west of the site and there are no other sites within 10km of the site. It was advised that an Appropriate Assessment Screening report and, as necessary, a Natura Impact Statement would be required, which deals with potential for significant impacts on European sites.
- The Commission's representatives noted that the proposed development is functionally connected to a proposed solar farm and that the application should include LVIA that includes assessment of cumulative impacts, with representative viewpoints to be agreed with the local authority.
- The Commission's representatives also noted multiple recorded monuments in the vicinity of both option sites and advised the prospective applicant to consult with the National Monument Service regarding the scope of supporting assessment required with the application.
- The prospective applicant queried the Commission's intended approach to pre-application consultations and strategic infrastructure development applications under the new Planning and Development Act, 2024, including transitional arrangements. The Commission's representatives advised that it has no insight into planned commencement of the relevant provisions of the 2024 Act or what transitional arrangements may be put in place.
- The meeting was concluded by the prospective applicant stating that they will continue to engage in discussions with the county council in relation to the

proposed development. It was indicated that the intent at this time was to leave the pre application consultation open pending the confirmation of the favoured grid connection option and the conclusion of consultations.

Conclusion:

The Commission's representatives advised that the onus is on the prospective applicant to either request a further meeting or formal closure of the instant pre-application consultation process. The Commission's representatives advised that the record of the instant meeting will be issued in the meantime and that the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of any further meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 12:15pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Kay", is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning