



Case Reference / Description	Proposed development of 220kV Loop-in-Substation and Grid Connection at Coolfin, County Offaly.		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Date	8 th June 2026	Start Time	11:00am
Location	MS Teams	End Time	11.30am

Representing An Coimisiún Pleanála
Stephen Rhys Thomas (Assistant Planning Director) Chair
Barry O'Donnell (Senior Planning Inspector)
Honor Caird Marren (Executive Officer)

Representing the Prospective Applicant
Ciaran Donnelly, GP Joule
Conor Campbell, GP Joule
Jonathan Burkhardt, GP Joule

Introduction

The Commission referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 23rd of April 2026, requesting pre-application consultations under section 182A 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,
- 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 set out their presentation, which is attached to the file.

Discussion:

- The Commission's representatives queried whether consultations have taken place between the prospective applicant and EirGrid regarding the proposed substation and the alternative possibility of connecting to existing infrastructure in the area. The prospective applicant stated that consultations have taken place and the existing substation network in the area is heavily constrained. The proposed development may

not facilitate only the proposed Coolfin Solar Farm, but possibly other projects that have been consented or which have yet to be consented.

- The prospective applicant endeavours to break the 220kV system, to create a renewable hub connection and minimise the amount of transition infrastructure on the system, and has EirGrid's support.
- The Commission's representatives stated that justification for why the prospective applicant have their own standalone development should be set out in the application.
- The Commission's representatives advised that the issue of prematurity is often raised for projects such as this, where there are separate consenting processes, and advised that the application should address whether this development is capable of a standalone operation rather than being dependent on and solely serving the function of the proposed Coolfin solar farm.

EIA and AA

- The Commission's representatives advised that a substation is not itself of a class for the purposes of EIA. However, the recent rural restructuring provision in terms of land regrading and hedgerow removal should be considered, and it would be helpful for the prospective applicant to quantify in linear metres how much hedgerow will be removed.
- Development plan policy BLP-24 provides support for protection of hedgerows of amenity or biodiversity value. The clearance of hedgerows as part of the development may represent a Material Contravention of the policy and the issue should be addressed by the application. A robust landscaping scheme will also be required as part of the application.
- In terms of AA, the Commission's representatives advised that the western boundary of the subject site abuts an open drain that ultimately flows into the River Shannon and provides a hydrological connection to a European site. The application should include an Appropriate Assessment Screening and potentially, a Natura Impact Statement.
- The Commission's representatives noted that site overlies a layer of peat that straddles the western boundary and which also appears to underlie the open drain. The impacts of drainage and excavation of the peat soil, and its consequential impacts on the environment and climate, should be addressed in the application.

- The prospective applicant confirmed that they have requested consultation with the National Park and Wildlife Service. They are currently undergoing the first round of ecology surveys for the proposed solar farm and the substation lands.
 - The Commission's representatives advised of the requirement for a landscape and visual assessment, including photomontages, as part of the application, with a particular focus on the cumulative impacts of recent renewable energy and infrastructure developments on the local landscape.
 - The Commission's representatives advised that the application should include a flood risk assessment that outlines or addresses the vulnerability of the site to flooding.
 - The Commission's representatives advised that a separate standalone document should be included with the application referencing the Water Framework Directive and how on-site surface water will be managed.
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- The Commission's representatives advised that the site is unzoned and the application should be justified against National, Regional and Local policies.
 - The Commission's representatives advised that there are a number of monument records to the north, at Streamstown. There is a potential for other finds. The National Monuments Service should be consulted regarding the scoping of supporting assessment as part of the application.
 - The Commission's representatives advised that any welfare facilities should be a self-contained unit, and the waste should be tanked and disposed of offsite.
 - The prospective applicant advised that there is an interface mast at all EirGrid HV substations, that will likely be the communication method between EirGrid and the substation. Waiting to hear feedback on access to ESB fibre telecoms in the ground.
 - The Commission's representatives advised that the applicant could give consideration within the application that the proposed substation may be made available to other developments that require a connection to the grid.
 - It was the preliminary opinion of the Commission's representatives that the proposed development of the substation and grid connection falls within the scope of strategic infrastructure. The final determination is ultimately a matter for the Commissioners.

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 11:30.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Rhys Thomas', written over a horizontal line.

18/03/26

Stephen Rhys Thomas

Assistant Director of Planning