



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ACP-324124-26

Development

Proposed development of 220kV
Loop-in-Substation and Grid
Connection.

Location

at Coolfin, County Offaly.

Planning Authority

Offaly County Council

Type of Application

Pre-Application consultation under
Section 182E of the Planning and
Development Act 2000, as amended.

Prospective Applicant

GP JOULE Ireland Limited

Inspector

Barry O'Donnell

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Commission received a request on 27th February 2026 from GP JOULE Ireland Ltd to enter into pre-application consultations under Section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in relation to a proposed 220kV loop-in substation and associated transmission cable to connect to the National Grid. The site is located in the townland of Coolfin, Co. Offaly.
- 1.2. A pre-application meeting was held between the Commission's representatives and the prospective applicant on 8th June 2026, the purpose of which was to outline details of the proposed development and address whether the proposed development constitutes Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) in accordance with the meaning provided by the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. Consideration was also given to issues relating to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area that may have a bearing on the Commission's decision on any future application. Following this meeting, the prospective applicant formally requested closure of the pre-application process in correspondence received by the Commission on 8th July 2026.
- 1.3. This report provides an overview of the proposed development and a summary of the pre-application meeting, including advice provided by the Commission's representatives, and relevant legislative provisions.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. The subject site is located in the townland of Coolfin, approx. 3.5km east of Banagher in Co. Offaly. The site is greenfield in nature and is currently in agricultural use.
- 2.2. The proposed substation site is located approx. 700m west of the L3010, in a field that is accessed from a farm track. The site was inaccessible at the time of inspection, but it can be seen from up-to-date aerial photography that it is enclosed by hedgerows to the south and west and the farm track to the north. A stream routes along the western boundary of the field and discharges into the River Shannon to the north.

3.0 Proposed Development

3.1. According to the accompanying cover letter, the proposed development comprises: -

- A sixteen bay 220kV loop-in gas insulated switchgear (GIS) transmission substation and associated Independent Power Producer (IPP) substation.
- An underground 220kV transmission cable connecting to the proposed loop-in substation.
- Associated electrical plant and ancillary works necessary to connect to the Eirgrid transmission network.

3.2. The cover letter states that the development is intended to facilitate the export of electricity generated by the proposed Coolfin Solar Farm.

4.0 Prospective Applicant's Case

4.1. The prospective applicant's case, as outlined in the cover letter submitted can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed development is necessary to facilitate export of renewable electricity at transmission voltage and would operate as an integral component of the national transmission system. The development is consistent with the type and scale of electricity infrastructure that has been determined by the Commission in previous cases to fall within the scope of S182A of the Act.

5.0 Relevant Planning History

5.1. I did not encounter any planning records pertaining to the subject site.

6.0 Relevant Precedents

6.1. There are a large number of pre-application directions pertaining to substation and grid connection infrastructure proposals that are of relevance to this pre-application proposal. These include: -

ABP Ref. No.	Location	Development Description	Decision Date	Decision
ACP-323974-25	Co. Cork	110/20kV substation and ancillary works	11/3/26	Is SID
ACP-323959-25	Co. Cork	110/38kV substation	11/3/26	Is SID
ACP-323874-25	Co. Galway	220kV substation and grid connection	3/2/26	Is SID
ACP-323789-25	Co. Dublin	110/38kV substation	2/10/25	Is SID
ACP-323627-25	Co. Tipperary	110kV GIS substation and grid connection	23/1/26	Is SID
ACP-323569-25	Co. Cork	110kV substation and grid connection	22/10/26	Is SID
ACP-323441-25	Co. Kilkenny	110kV GIS substation and grid connection	24/10/25	Is SID
ACP-323167-25	Co. Kerry	110kV AIS substation and grid connection	8/1/26	Is SID
ABP-322217-25	Co. Dublin	220/110kV GIS substation	11/6/25	Is SID
ABP-320154-24	Co. Cork	220kV AIS substation and associated 220kV grid connection	23/9/24	Is SID
ABP-319771-24	Co. Roscommon	BESS, 110kV substation and associated grid connection	5/9/24	110kV substation and 110kV underground cables are SID. BESS is not SID
ABP-319155-24	Co. Cork	110kV substation and grid connection to adjacent 220kV substation	19/6/24	Is SID
ABP-318432-23	Co. Wexford	110kV substation and 110kV overhead loop-in cable	1/2/24	Is SID
ABP-318119-24	Co. Kerry	2 No. 220kV GIS substations and associated 220kV grid connection	15/5/24	Is SID
ABP-318011-23		BESS, 110kV substation and 110kV underground grid connection	18/12/23	110kV substation and 110kV underground cables are SID. BESS is not SID
ABP-315972-23	Co. Louth	2 No. 110kV substations and grid connections	1/6/23	Is SID

ABP-315476-23	Co. Clare	110kV substation and associated grid connection	6/6/23	Is SID
ABP-315433-23	Co. Kildare	220kV Air Insulated Switchgear tail-fed substation with associated 220kV underground grid connection	8/5/23	Is SID

7.0 Legislative Provisions

Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended

- 7.1. Section 2(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended ('2000 Act'), defines 'strategic infrastructure' as including, inter alia:

"any proposed development referred to in section 182A(1)"

- 7.2. Under subsection 182A(1) of the 2000 Act, where a person (the 'undertaker') intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, the undertaker shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, an application for approval of the development under section 182B and shall apply to the Commission for such approval accordingly.

- 7.3. Subsection 182A(9) states that:

"... 'transmission', in relation to electricity, shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 but, for the purposes of this section, the foregoing expression, in relation to electricity, shall also be construed as meaning the transport of electricity by means of—

(a) a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110 kilovolts or more, or

(b) an interconnector, whether ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not."

- 7.4. Section 182E(1) provides that a prospective applicant who proposes to apply for approval under section 182B or 182D shall, before making the application, enter into consultations with the Commission in relation to the proposed development.

Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended

7.5. Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended ('1999 Act'), sets out the following definitions:

- **'Transmission':**

"...the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system, that is to say a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Commission may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system but shall include any interconnector owned by the Commission."

- **'Electric line':**

"...has the meaning assigned to it by section 4(1) of the ESB (Electronic Communications Networks) Act 2014."

The definition set out in s.4(1) of the 2014 Act is as follows:

"...any line which is used solely or amongst other things for carrying electricity for any purpose and as including –

(a) any support for any such line, that is to say, any structure, pole or other thing in, on, by or from which any such line may be supported, carried or suspended,

(b) any apparatus connected to or associated with any such line for the purpose of carrying electricity or electronic communications services, whether such apparatus is owned by the Commission or by any company referred to in section 2 or by a company which has been provided access or services referred to in section 3, or

any wire, cable, tube, pipe or similar thing (including its casing or coating) which is used for the purpose of carrying electricity or electronic communications services and which surrounds or supports or is surrounded or supported by, or is installed in close proximity to, or is supported, carried or suspended in association with, any such line."

- **'Electric plant':**

"...any plant, apparatus or appliance used for, or for the purposes connected with, the generation, transmission, distribution or supply of electricity other than –

(a) An electric line

(b) a meter used for ascertaining the quantity of electricity supplied to any premises, or

(c) an electrical appliance under the control of a consumer"

- **'Distribution':**

"...the transport of electricity by means of a distribution system, that is to say, a system which consists of electric lines, electric plant, transformers and switchgear and which is used for conveying electricity to final customers".

8.0 Consultation Meeting

8.1. One pre-application consultation meeting was held with the prospective applicant on the 8th June 2026. The meeting record relating to this development proposal and the presentation made by the applicant to the Commission's representatives are attached to the file.

9.0 Assessment

9.1. The definition of 'strategic infrastructure' includes development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, with 'transmission' defined as either:

- The transport of electricity by means of a high voltage line of 110 kV or more, or an interconnector.
- The transport of electricity by means of a transmission system (a system of high voltage lines and electric plant used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers, including interconnectors but excluding distribution system lines).

- 9.2. The proposed development comprises a 220kV GIS transmission substation, associated Independent Power Producer (IPP) substation and associated grid connection on lands at Coolfin, Co. Offaly. The Prospective Applicant states that the development is functionally connected to the proposed Coolfin Solar Farm and is necessary to facilitate export of renewable electricity at transmission voltage. They further state that the development would operate as an integral component of the national transmission system.
- 9.3. The Prospective Applicant is seeking a determination from the Commission as to whether the substation and grid connection is or is not SID and I note from the pre-application submission documents that they consider that it is SID.
- 9.4. Under Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), an undertaker shall apply to the Board for approval of a development comprising or for the purposes of energy transmission. Section 182A (9) sets a threshold of 110kV, in order for a high-voltage transmission line to be considered SID, for its purposes. The Act does not provide a threshold for a substation, however; the Board will note that the subject proposal includes 220kV infrastructure, in terms of both the substation and connecting cables and the applicant also states that the proposal will be connected to the grid via loop in connection to the existing 220kV overhead lines. I consider the proposed substation and grid connection fall within the definition of transmission, in accordance with Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999.
- 9.5. I have previously outlined at Section 6 of this Report a number of precedent pre-application cases in relation to electricity transmission infrastructure under S182E, where the Board determined that the provision of both 220kV and 110kV substations and grid connections acting as a node on the transmission system constitutes SID. I consider these cases are directly related to the current proposal.
- 9.6. Thus, from the information available to me, I am of the opinion that the proposal constitutes SID.
- 9.7. In conclusion, therefore, I recommend that the Commission issue a determination that the proposed development, consisting of a 200kV GIS transmission substation, IPP substation, 220kV underground grid connection and associated electrical plant,

falls within the scope of section 182A of the 2000 Act, as amended, and that a planning application should be made directly to the Commission.

9.8. A list of prescribed bodies is set out in Appendix 1.

10.0 Recommendation

10.1. I recommend that the Prospective Applicant, GP JOULE Ireland Limited, be informed that the proposed development of a 200kV GIS transmission substation, IPP substation, 220kV underground grid connection and associated electrical plant on lands at Coolfin, Co. Offaly, as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála on 27th February 2026 falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and that a planning application should therefore be made directly to the Commission;

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, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.



Barry O'Donnell
Senior Planning Inspector

9th July 2026.

Appendix 1 – Prescribed Bodies

The following is a list of prescribed bodies considered by the Board to be relevant to the proposed development: -

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications.
- Commission for Regulation of Utilities.
- Offaly County Council
- The Heritage Council
- ESB
- Eirgrid
- An Taisce
- The Heritage Council
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Health and Safety Authority

Further notifications should be made where deemed appropriate.