



MEETING MINUTES

Project	160815 Ardderroo Wind Farm SID Application
Time & Date	20 th February 2017
Location	NPWS Offices, Galway

Attendance Details

Individual	Company	Abbreviation
Pat Roberts	McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan Ltd.	PR
John Hynes	McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan Ltd.	JH
Alex Ash	McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan Ltd.	AA
Dr. Tom Gittings	Consultant Ecologist/Client ecological representative	TG
Dr Julie Fossitt	NPWS – Dept. Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	JF

Item	Description
1.0	<p>Introduction and preliminary discussions</p> <p>PR commenced the meeting with general introductions and brief summary of the proposed agenda to consist of a description of the works undertaken along with the main findings and the assessments undertaken.</p> <p>This was to include discussions surrounding the information that was provided prior to the meeting.</p> <p>JH circulated hard copies of the briefing note that had been prepared and sent in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>JF stated that the advice and correspondence of the department in relation to the previous unsuccessful application was available and should be taken into account in any new proposal, and that it was not intended to provide observations in writing in response to the current scoping request.</p> <p>JF stated that any views or advice provided during the meeting was without prejudice to any future observations or submissions that the Department may make at subsequent stages.</p> <p>JF noted that the previous application was an SID application, and queried whether it had been the subject of an oral hearing.</p> <p>PR stated that this was correct and that in the intervening months (over one year), considerable work had been undertaken to address the issues raised during the previous application. The project team is confident that these issues have been satisfactorily addressed and one of the primary purposes of the meeting is to demonstrate how the</p>

<p>2.0</p> <p>3.0</p>	<p>additional work provides the information necessary to fully assess the impacts of the proposed development on ecology.</p> <p>PR noted that whilst the project was very similar to the previous application significant additional ecological surveys and assessments had been completed particularly in relation to birds and bats.</p> <p>JF Initial comments</p> <p>JF enquired whether official EIA scoping with ABP had been undertaken in line with the provisions for this in planning legislation, i.e. a formal opinion on the information to be contained within the EIS. She also queried whether the opinion of ABP had been sought in relation to the scope of the NIS, and whether that was possible</p> <p>PR responded saying that he was not aware that they had specifically requested the above and thought they were being provided voluntarily but would check.</p> <p>JF asked whether off site compensatory planting was necessary as part of the development.</p> <p>PR replied that it was (about 40ha to be felled) and the replanting lands would be the subject of a separate ecological impact assessment and AA Screening report/NIS specifically undertaken as part of the proposed development and included within (or appended to) the NIS for the windfarm project. The Appropriate Assessment would then be undertaken by ABP as the Competent Authority.</p> <p>JF stated that the impacts must be assessed as part of the EIS and NIS for the project (i.e. no project splitting, and compensatory planting appears to be integral to the proposed development). If there is reliance on the Forest Service's EIAs and/or AAs of the afforestation areas in other locations/counties, then the relevant determinations should be sourced and presented as evidence of that fact in the current application. The impacts of the development, including tree harvesting, also need to be assessed in combination with existing and ongoing forestry operations, and again the Forest Service's decisions and assessments should be taken into consideration and presented as evidence.</p> <p>JF said that if possible, any information from assessments and ongoing surveys and monitoring of forestry operations and adjoining/nearby windfarm developments under construction should be sourced and used to inform the assessment. Plan-level mitigation from the County Development Plan and associated Wind Energy Strategy for a development of this type in this area should also be taken into account</p> <p>JF noted that limestone fill is being used for road building on the neighbouring sites and considered that this was inappropriate for a site that is located on siliceous bedrock</p> <p>PR responded saying that the current proposal will use siliceous rock from identified borrow pits on the site and will not use limestone fill</p> <p>JF advised to follow the relevant legislation where this has updated or altered aspects of guidelines on AA in particular – what is happening is that an NIS is being prepared.</p> <p>PR responded saying that the assessments will follow the relevant legislation but will also follow the necessary guidelines so that the application is not exposed to criticism for either not following the relevant legislation or guidance.</p> <p>Briefing regarding Flora and Fauna (excl. Birds)</p>
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JH provided summary of the survey work undertaken in relation to flora and fauna (excl. birds), described the methodologies undertaken and the main findings. JF did not disagree with the information provided but raised questions and made points throughout the briefing. The main points raised are provided below:

JF queried the categorisation of the habitat on the site only as conifer plantation when this occurred on Blanket Bog habitat; this needed to be acknowledged. The presence of trees and drains did not mean that Blanket bog was not there, and it would be possible to restore.

JH responded saying that in most circumstances the habitat had been heavily drained, planted with dense conifers for many years and supported no species that are indicative of Blanket Bog or heath. He did not consider that the majority of the conifer plantation could feasibly be restored to Blanket Bog but in some areas, where the trees had failed, there was some potential for restoration.

JF highlighted the requirement for a baseline assessment of the ecology of the downstream oligotrophic lakes and the watercourses on the site including Slender Naiad habitats

JF advised that account would need to be taken of the potential mobilisation of sediments, nutrients and pollutants associated with woodland felling and construction, and the history of fertiliser application would need to be taken into account. Phosphates mobilise when peats are disturbed

JH highlighted design of the scheme to avoid impacts on any watercourses through buffering and robust measures to avoid run off and pollution. He also described the amount of survey work that had been undertaken, desk study of information held by the IFI, Forest Service and other sources, field surveys including kick sampling and aquatic habitat surveys

JF advised that surveys could not be confined to within the application area only, particularly as sensitive receptors occurred downstream (SAC and Annex I and QI lakes, possible Slender Naiad). She considered it was not possible to mitigate entirely against impacts occurring outside the site boundary owing to peat, drains, previous forestry and disturbance. Habitat and hydro-chemical requirements of Slender Naiad could be used to inform whether targeted surveys are required in lakes.

JF advised that the site specific conservation objectives exist for SAC 002034 and targets and attributes need to be used to guide the details of the ecological assessment and analysis required. She advised that it is important to note whether the conservation objective is to maintain or to restore the favourable conservation condition of a particular QI.

This was noted by the team

JF advised that full details of the surveys that were undertaken to be included in the EIS and NIS but that careful consideration should be given to how the two documents would work in tandem to present all the necessary information without excessive duplication. Scoping the NIS (as opposed to having screening in the NIS) was also discussed

JH confirmed had provided a summary of the surveys undertaken and agreed that the details would be within the EIS.

JH confirmed that the surveys that were undertaken in line with BCT guidelines had revealed low levels of bat activity but nonetheless vegetative connectivity was to be maintained in the development. JH confirmed that Lesser Horseshoe had only occasionally been recorded on the site and that the previously recorded night roost at Letter Lodge was not regularly used and was being retained along with connectivity to it.

It was noted that water quality monitoring was essential before, during and after construction and that automated sondes was advised. The placement and operation of water quality monitoring equipment needs to be included in the application and application area, and ecological assessment.

4.0

Briefing regarding Birds

AA provided comprehensive summary of the survey work undertaken in relation to birds and the main findings. AA explained that following the previous application, a further full year of bird surveying had been undertaken. This had been undertaken following the relevant Scottish Natural Heritage Guidelines (2014). AA noted that overall bird activity had been low at all times and that the results most recent surveys had been very similar to the low activity levels that were previously recorded. JF did not disagree with the information provided but raised questions and made points throughout the briefing. The main points raised are provided below:

JF questioned the robustness of predictions regarding the lack of overflying migratory birds based on the standard limited number of hours of survey data, and the lack of night time surveys, and advised that survey times should sync with known arrival times of key species in Ireland in any given year. Whether there were useful results from radar monitoring of birds in any relevant site was queried

AA responded saying that SNH (2014) guidelines dictate the number and timing of hours on the site necessary to allow a thorough assessment of bird usage. These guidelines were followed and the data gathered will allow a comprehensive assessment of bird activity on the site. AA asked that in the absence of specific guidance relating to Ireland, was SNH (2014) was the most relevant guidance to follow with regard to bird surveying at wind farm sites.

TG noted that there were useful results from radar surveys undertaken at Cork Harbour but that situation had been very different, with very high resident bird populations. The site at Ardderroo had very low resident bird populations and no reason to consider the use of radar monitoring in this case. The SNH guidance only recommends use of radar where high nocturnal activity of important species is likely.

JF stated that when completing an impact assessment for birds, assessment and monitoring results from nearby windfarms should be considered.

AA replied that it would be considered and used in the impact assessment.

It was noted that a viewshed analysis would be required to demonstrate that the bird surveys covered an adequate amount of the site.

AA confirmed that such an analysis had been completed and would be included within the EIS and that coverage of the site was over 90%

JF advised that the cumulative impact on birds of all the windfarms in the area needs to be assessed and that data from the surrounding sites needs to be considered in the assessment.

AA confirmed that the assessment would take into account the cumulative impact of the surrounding wind farms. Data from the surrounding sites would be taken into account where it is available.

5.0

Discussion of the NIS

JH described the rationale used when providing the information necessary to complete an AA Screening and went on to describe the content and structure of the draft NIS.

JF made the following points and comments during the course of the briefing:

JF advised that the legislation was followed with regard to the preparation of the NIS, which was a voluntary NIS in this case. She advised that it was the authority's job to carry out screening and that this did not need to be in the NIS. Screening had various meanings, including the formal sense of 'screening for appropriate assessment' by the authority.

TG noted this and suggested that the decision as to which European Sites and which Qis/SCIs are potentially effected is really an exercise in determining the scope of the NIS rather than an AA Screening.

JF agreed and stated that the NIS should then focus on the Scientific assessment of the potential for the proposed development to result in adverse effects on individual habitats and species.

JF noted that, in relation to Lesser Horseshoe Bat, whilst the proposed development may be within the identified range of 6 km from two European Sites that are designated for this species, she was aware that the population for which the Lough Corrib SAC was designated was not located within this distance and such factors should be taken into account when considering the scope of the scientific assessment and analysis in the NIS.

JH acknowledged that he was aware of this and had included this following the precautionary principle and because the information regarding the population of qualifying interest was not publicly available. He questioned whether this could be confirmed and how would he be able to demonstrate that this was the case.

JF replied that the Site Specific Conservation Objectives for Lough Corrib SAC were due to be published soon and would make this clearer.

6.0

Conclusions

PR asked if any further information regarding either surveys, analysis or reporting was required or were there any further questions.

JF advised that any mitigation needs to be included in detail in the application and if being relied upon to reach conclusions, must be proven to be achievable and likely to be effective in any given scenario it is needed. Proof of effectiveness will be required with examples of where similar techniques have been employed previously.

PR confirmed that MKO are involved during the construction phase of a number of wind farms and are responsible for the implementation of sediment control plans and environmental supervision and monitoring on an ongoing basis. He confirmed that we have confidence in our proposals and will provide evidence of their suitability and effectiveness in the EIS chapter.

PR and JF agreed that draft minutes would be sent to the NPWS in word format for adoption following review and amendment by the agreement of both parties.

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