

2.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This section of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) presents information on renewable energy and climate change policy and targets, the strategic, regional and local planning context for the Proposed Development, planning history, scoping and consultation, as well as setting out the nature of the cumulative impact assessment process undertaken.

2.1

Introduction

This section of the EIAR presents the policies and targets which have been put in place at the various levels of Government, both national and international, in relation to renewable energy and climate change. The details below set out the need for the Proposed Development to aid Ireland in meeting its national targets and European commitments in relation to climate change and decarbonisation.

The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development will deliver renewable energy onto the national grid. The need to decarbonise the economy and reduce emissions has always been imperative, however in recent years the urgency involved has become clearer to all stakeholders. The Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) published by the Government on the 4th of November 2021 has clearly identified the urgent requirement for combatting climate change and for the immediate reduction in greenhouse gasses.

The CAP21 sets a sectoral roadmap which aims to deliver a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and net-zero emissions by no later than 2050. *“The Plan lists the actions needed to deliver on our climate targets and will be updated annually, including in 2022, to ensure alignment with our legally binding economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings.”*

This review of relevant policy contained in this Section of the EIAR concludes that the Proposed Development is consistent with the overarching planning framework with regard to facilitating the move away from dependency on fossil fuels and the promotion of proper planning and sustainable development.

The primary driver behind the Proposed Development is the need to provide additional renewable energy to offset the use of fossil fuels within the electricity generating sector by serving the Permitted Development. Increasing electricity generation from wind and solar power represents the most economical renewable option to reduce emissions within the power generation sector and is the most mature technology available to achieve national targets that have been established for decarbonisation.

This review of relevant policy contained in this Section of the EIAR concludes that the Proposed Development is consistent with the overarching planning framework with regard to facilitating the move away from dependency on fossil fuels and the promotion of proper planning and sustainable development.

2.1.1

Climate Change Policy and Targets

International and national policy consistently identifies the need to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and stresses the importance of reducing global warming. The context of international policy has altered over the last 30-years from being of a warning nature to the current, almost universally accepted belief, that there is a climate change emergency occurring both within Ireland and at a broader global scale. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment

Report¹ published in 2021 provides a stark assessment of global climate change and presents evidence that climate changes will increase in all regions of the globe over the coming decades and that much of the damage caused by climate change up to this point is now likely irreversible, such as the rise in sea levels over the 21st century. The Climate Status Report for Ireland 2020² similarly reflects on clear and distinct impacts arising from climate change effects within an Irish context:

- An increase in the number of warm spell days the last 60 years with very little change in cold spell duration;
- Annual precipitation was 6% higher in the period 1989–2018, compared with the 30-year period 1961–1990, and the decade 2006–2015 has been the wettest on record;
- Satellite observations indicate that the sea level around Ireland has risen by approximately 2–3mm per year since the early 1990s; and
- In 2018, carbon dioxide emissions were almost 18% higher than in 1990, primarily due to increased fossil fuel combustion in transport and energy industries.

The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report does not, however, conclude that a climate catastrophe is inevitable, but rather, there remains a 'narrow path' to determine the future course of climate, mainly by cutting emissions down to net zero. The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development will contribute to the decarbonisation of the energy sector and reduce harmful emissions. In this regard, it is in compliance with national and international climate change policy and targets.

2.1.1.1 International Policy and Targets

In 1992, countries joined an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as a framework for international efforts to combat the challenge posed by climate change. The UNFCCC seeks to limit average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change. In addition, the UNFCCC seeks to cope with impacts that are already inevitable. It recognises that the climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The framework set no binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms. Instead, the framework outlines how specific international treaties (called "protocols" or "Agreements") may be negotiated to set binding limits on greenhouse gases.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol operationalises the UNFCCC by committing industrialised countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce GHG emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. Ireland is a Party to the Kyoto Protocol, which came into effect in 2005, and as a result of which, emission reduction targets agreed by developed countries are now binding.

In Doha, Qatar, on 8th December 2012, the "*Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol*" was adopted. The amendment includes:

- New commitments for Annex I Parties to the Kyoto Protocol who agreed to take on commitments in a second commitment period from 1st January 2013 to 31st December 2020;
- A revised list of greenhouse gases (GHG) to be reported on by Parties in the second commitment period; and
- Amendments to several articles of the Kyoto Protocol which specifically referenced issues pertaining to the first commitment period and which needed to be updated for the second commitment period.

¹ Climate Change 2021 'The Physical Science Basis' (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, August 2021)

² Climate Status Report for Ireland 2020 (Environmental Protection Agency, Marine Institute, Met Éireann, August 2021)

Under the protocol, countries must meet their targets primarily through national measures, although market-based mechanisms (such as international emissions trading) can also be utilised.

COP21 Paris Agreement

COP21 was the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC. Every year since 1995 (excluding 2020 due to COVID-19), the COP has gathered the 196 Parties (195 countries and the European Union) that have ratified the Convention in a different country, to evaluate its implementation and negotiate new commitments. COP21 was organised by the United Nations in Paris and held from 30th November to 12th December 2015. COP21 closed with the adoption of the first international climate agreement (concluded by 195 countries and applicable to all). The 12-page text, made up of a preamble and 29 articles, provides for a limitation of the global average temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and **to limit the increase to 1.5°C**. It is flexible and takes into account the needs and capacities of each country. The IPCC's 6th Assessment Report (2021) further collaborates this need to limit any increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C, stating that (underlined for emphasis),

“Humanity has emitted 2,560 billion equivalent tons of CO₂ since 1750, and we only have a budget of 500 more if we want to limit warming to 1.5°C.

By following a trajectory of very low GHG emissions (SSP1-1.9), the threshold of 1.5°C will be reached in the short term, between 2021 and 2040, before being very slightly exceeded (1.6°C anticipated over the period 2041-2060) then respected in the long term (1.4°C anticipated over the period 2081-2100).

Everything is not lost, but we must pursue the Paris Agreement’s most ambitious goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C.”

An article published by the IPCC on the 6th October 2018 titled ‘*Global Warming of 1.5°C*’, notes the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways; in the context of mitigation pathways, strengthening of the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. This special report is part of an invitation contained in the Decision of the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to adopt the Paris Agreement, and provides an update on the impact of climate change if emissions are not reduced.

COP25 Madrid

COP25, the 25th session of the COP, was held between the 2nd and 13th of December 2019 in Madrid. The conference was characterised by repeated warnings from civil society (NGOs and corporates) on emerging evidence and scientific consensus on climate change risk. Specifically, it was noted that there are only c. ‘10 years left’ before the opportunity of limiting global warming to 1.5°C is no longer feasible. As such, the only remaining approach to limiting raising global temperatures is a ‘7.6% reduction of global GHG emissions every year between 2020 and 2030, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050’. However, consensus was not achieved between States on finalising the operating rules of the Paris Agreement and to ensure that it became operational by 2020. Three issues which emerged between States from the COP25 are summarised below:

- There was no uniform consensus between States to raise countries’ climate ambitions, e.g. to make increased commitments in light of growing climate change data. Some States were opposed to imposing any obligation on countries to submit enhanced pledges next year, arguing it should be each country’s own decision. All states were required to submit a review of their commitments for COP 26 in 2020. At the current level of climate targets, within a decade, the objective of the Paris Agreement will no longer be achievable;

- There was no agreement on finalising Article 6, the foundations for international cooperation to combat climate change. The aim was to establish the rules for new international mechanisms for financing and transferring GHG emission reductions; and
- There was no agreement on financing (Green Climate Fund); specifically, relating to both loss and damage caused by climate change.

Despite the lack of consensus on the above challenges, the COP25 did achieve more limited success with regard to the introduction of the “*San Jose Principles for High Ambition and Integrity of International Carbon Markets*”, which sets out the framework on which a robust carbon market should be built. These principles include, but are not limited to:

- Ensures environmental integrity and enables the highest possible mitigation ambition;
- Delivers an overall mitigation in global emissions, moving beyond zero-sum offsetting approaches to help accelerate the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions;
- Prohibits the use of pre-2020 units, Kyoto units and allowances, and any underlying reductions toward Paris Agreement and other international goals; and
- Ensures that double counting is avoided and that all use of markets toward international climate goals is subject to corresponding adjustments.

These principles were supported by 23 EU, including Ireland, and Latin American countries, 5 no. pacific islands and 2 no. countries in the Caribbean.

COP26 Glasgow

COP26 took place in Glasgow, Scotland between the 31st October and 12th November 2021. The summit was centred around the fact that “*climate change is the greatest risk facing us all.*” The UK, as hosts for the summit, have developed a ten-point plan to deliver a green industrial revolution, seeking to lead the world in tackling and adapting to climate change.

The key items COP26 seeks to achieve are:

- Secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach;
- Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats;
- Mobilise finance;
- Work together to deliver.

All world leaders at the summit confirmed the need to urgently address the gaps in ambition and work together to achieve climate action.

The summit highlighted that the Paris Agreement is working, with leaders outlining national targets and efforts to further reduce emissions. There was a clear commitment to working together to achieve climate aims, with significant announcements including:

- “*Over 40 leaders joined the Breakthrough Agenda, a 10-year plan to work together to create green jobs and growth globally, making clean technologies and solutions the most affordable, accessible and attractive option before 2030 – beginning with power, road transport, steel, hydrogen and agriculture.*”
- “*Over 120 countries covering more than 90% of the world’s forests endorsed the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests & Land Use committing to work collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030, backed by the biggest ever commitment of public funds for forest conservation and a global roadmap to make 75% of forest commodity supply chains sustainable.*”
- “*A Just Energy Transition Partnership was announced to support South Africa’s decarbonisation efforts; a powerful example of collaboration between an emerging economy and international partners.*”

- *The launch of the Global Methane Pledge saw over 100 countries committing collectively to reduce global methane emissions by 30% by 2030.*"

European Green Deal – European Climate Law (2021)

The European Green Deal, initially introduced by the European Commission in December 2019, sets out the ‘blueprint’ for a transformational change of the 27-country bloc from a high- to a low-carbon economy, without reducing prosperity and while improving people’s quality of life, through cleaner air and water, better health and a thriving natural world. The Green Deal is intended to work through a framework of regulation and legislation setting clear overarching targets, e.g. a **bloc-wide goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and a 55% cut in emissions by 2030 (compared with 1990 levels)**. This is a substantial increase compared to the existing target, upwards from the previous target of at least 40% (2030 Climate & Energy Framework), and furthermore, these targets demonstrate the ambition necessary to keep the global temperature increase to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to keep it to 1.5°C as per the Paris Agreement. With regard to the energy sector, the Green Deal focuses on 3 no. key principles for the clean energy transition, which will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance the quality of life for citizens:

- Ensuring a secure and affordable EU energy supply;
- Developing a fully integrated, interconnected and digitalised EU energy market; and
- Prioritising energy efficiency, improving the energy performance of our buildings and developing a power sector based largely on renewable sources (e.g. the subject development).

The European Climate Law³ writes into law the objectives set out above in the European Green Deal for Europe’s economy and society to become climate-neutral by 2050. Climate neutrality by 2050 means achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions for EU countries as a whole, mainly by cutting emissions, investing in green technologies and protecting the natural environment. The Climate Law includes:

- A legal objective for the Union to reach climate neutrality by 2050;
- An ambitious 2030 climate target of at least 55% reduction of net emissions of greenhouse gases as compared to 1990, with clarity on the contribution of emission reductions and removals;
- A process for setting a 2040 climate target, taking into account an indicative greenhouse gas budget for 2030-2050 to be published by the Commission;
- A commitment to negative emissions after 2050;
- The establishment of European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, that will provide independent scientific advice;
- Stronger provisions on adaptation to climate change; and
- Strong coherence across Union policies with the climate neutrality objective.

The law aims to ensure that all EU policies contribute to this goal and that all sectors of the economy and society play their part. All 27 no. EU Member States have committed to turning the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050. One third of the 1.8 trillion-euro investments from the Next Generation EU Recovery Plan, and the EU’s seven-year budget, will finance the European Green Deal. On 14th July 2021, the European Commission adopted a set of proposals⁴ to make the EU’s climate, energy, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. Achieving these emission reductions in the next decade which is crucial to Europe becoming the world’s first climate-neutral continent by 2050 would clearly be assisted by the Proposed Development.

³ *European Climate Law was published in the Official Journal on 9 July 2021 and came into force on 29 July 2021.*

⁴ *Fit for 55: delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality (July 2021)*

2.1.1.2 National Policy

Programme for Government (2020)

The Programme for Government 2020 (June 2020) places specific emphasis on climate change, stating that the next ten years are a critical period in addressing the climate crisis, and therefore, a deliberate and swift approach to reducing more than half of Ireland’s carbon emissions over the course of the decade (2020-2030) must be implemented. The programme states that the government are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an average 7% per annum over the next decade in a push to achieve a net zero emissions by the year 2050.

With regard to energy generation, the Programme notes that the government is committed to the rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector. The Programme states the government’s ongoing support and commitment to take “*the necessary action to deliver at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030.*” While it is noted this has been updated by the 2021 Climate Action Plan, the Programme for Government sets out a range of measures to achieve this target which remain relevant, including:

- Finalise and publish the Wind Energy Guidelines;
- Continue Eirgrid’s programme ‘Delivering a Secure, Sustainable Electricity System’;
- Strengthen the policy framework to incentivise electricity storage and interconnection;
- Produce a whole-of-government plan setting out how we will deliver at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act (2021)

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, which was signed into law on the 23rd July 2021, legally binds Ireland to achieve net-Zero emissions no later than 2050, and to a **51% reduction in emissions by the end of this decade**. The Act provides the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments and to become a leader in addressing climate change. As indicated by the premise of the legislation, the reduction of emissions is a key proponent of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and incorporates the following key provisions:

- Embeds the process of setting binding and ambitious emissions-reductions targets in law;
- Provides for a national climate objective, which commits to pursue and achieve no later than 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral economy;
- Provides that the first two five-year carbon budgets proposed by the Climate Change Advisory Council should equate to a total reduction of 51% over the period to 2030, relative to a baseline of 2018;
- The role of the Climate Change Advisory Council has been strengthened;
- The government must adopt carbon budgets that are consistent with the Paris agreement and other international obligations;
- Actions for each sector will be detailed in the Climate Action Plan which must be updated annually; and
- Local Authorities must prepare individual Climate Action Plans which will include both mitigation and adaptation measures and will be updated every five years.

Report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action – Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action (2019)

In March 2019, the Joint Committee on Climate Action Change released a report detailing a cross party consensus for action. The report in its introduction states that “*Ireland’s performance in meeting*

international obligations has to date been poor” (refer to ‘Emissions Projections for Ireland’ below). The Report highlights on-going concern regarding emission projections and growing evidence that Ireland is off track in meeting its 2030 targets under the relevant the EU Directives.

The report states that the transformation of Ireland’s energy system will be required for the country to meet its future 2030 and 2050 GHG emission targets; specifically, in order to reach net zero emissions by 2050, Ireland will be required to fully decarbonise electricity generation. Therefore, there is a clear incentive for developing, and safeguarding, Ireland’s capacity in renewable energies and renewable electricity. Since this report was published, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 has been enacted and there have been recent progress / future scenario assessments (e.g. EirGrid’s ‘All Island Generation Capacity Statement 2021 – 2030’ (September 2021)).

Climate Action Plan 2021 (the “Plan”)

The Climate Action Plan 2021 (‘the Plan’) published on the 4th of November 2021, sets out the detail for taking action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050. The 2021 Plan builds on the measures and technologies set out in the 2019 Climate Action Plan to deliver greater ambition. The greater ambition requires a greater range of measures under the 2021 Plan, reflected in two categories of ‘core measures’ and ‘further measures’. ‘Core measures’ set out to meet the 2030 targets cover the fundamentals of decarbonisation and include the development of a renewable energy electricity supply. These ‘core measures’ are not, by themselves sufficient to deliver the ambitions set out and so a series of ‘further measures’ will also be necessary which are more technically challenging or not yet available in Ireland at the scale required, e.g. Biogas/biomethane, green hydrogen, carbon capture and storage. While deploying all the core measures would reduce emissions by 10-11 MtCO₂eq. by 2030, undertaking further measures could close the gap. All sectors will have to further their efforts from those outlined in the 2019 Plan if the core and further measures are to be achieved. Figure 4.3 of the Plan, copied below illustrates the impacts across the sectors.

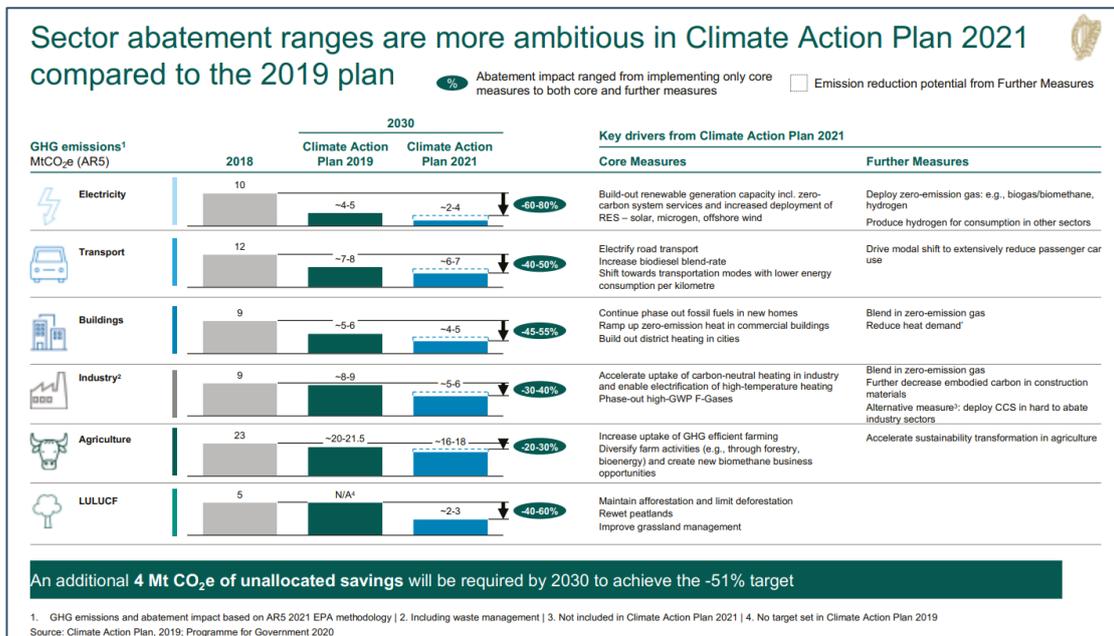


Figure 2-1: CAP 2021 and CAP 2019 Sector Abatement Ranges

With regards electricity, the Plan aims to increase the proportion of renewable electricity up to 80% by 2030. The Plan highlights that “sustained efforts across sectors will be required to meet targets” and for electricity “The proposed pathway includes a more rapid build-out of renewable generation capacity (wind and solar power generation technologies), increased storage, and the deployment of zero-

emissions gas. The decarbonisation pathway for the electricity sector is challenging given the rapid growth in demand for power, as well as the need to ensure security of supply through the decarbonisation journey.” To achieve the 80% renewable electricity envisioned, the indicative onshore wind capacity is set in the Plan at up to ~8GW.

Section 11 of the Plan considers electricity specifically and notes that in 2018 electricity accounted for 16.2% of Ireland's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The intention is to continue to decarbonise the electricity sector by “taking advantage of our significant renewable energy resources...” The Plan continues:

“The share of electricity from renewable energy increased almost five-fold between 2005 and 2018 – from 7.2% to 33.7% – an increase of over 26 percentage points in 13 years. This increase in the share of renewables came despite a rise in the total demand for electricity. In absolute terms, there has been a more than six-fold increase in the volume of renewable electricity generated, from 1,873 GWh in 2005 to 11,780 GWh in 2019.”

Despite the positive trends, the Plan states that “Additional electricity generation and transmission infrastructure will be a critical enabler to achieve our renewable energy and emissions targets” and “total electricity demand over the next ten years is forecast to grow by between 19% and 50%...” The dedicated electricity targets to meet the required level of emissions reduction by 2030 are set out at Section 11.2 of the Plan as follows:

- Reduce CO₂eq. emissions from the sector to a range of 2 to 4 MtCO₂eq. by 2030.
- Carry out a work programme to identify a route to deliver 1-3 TWh of zero emissions gas (including green hydrogen) by 2030, potentially equivalent to 0.2-0.4 MtCO₂eq. abatement.

The climate targets set out will be delivered through a set of enabling targets by 2030; those relevant to the development proposal are:

- *“Increasing the share of electricity demand generated from renewable sources to up to 80% where achievable and cost effective, without compromising security of electricity supply.*
- *Expand and reinforce the grid – through the addition of lines, substations, and new technologies.*
- *Ensure that 20-30% of system demand is flexible by 2030”.*

Large scale renewable generation is identified as a key measure in meeting the targets set out and includes: (inter alia):

- *“Achieving the renewable electricity target of up to 80% will entail investment of tens of billions of euro, including in the installation and maintenance of generation assets, and associated infrastructure and services, as well as in the development of supply chains and port infrastructure.*
- *EirGrid will carry out further grid, operational and market studies to understand any additional measures, beyond current plans, to facilitate reduced sectoral emissions ceilings and, therefore, support annual renewable electricity share of up to 80%”.*

A range of specific Actions are set out in the Plan with regards the various sectors; for the electricity sector the following are specifically relevant:

- *Action 100: “Ensure a supportive spatial planning framework for onshore renewable electricity generation development.”*
- *Action 102: “Deliver regular Onshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auctions that aligns with spatial and planning policy and efficient use of the network.”*
- *Action 112: “Develop the onshore electricity grid to support renewable energy targets.”*

Emissions Projections for Ireland (2021 – 2040)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publish Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections and at the time of writing, the most recent report, ‘Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections 2021–2040’ was published in June 2022. The report includes an assessment of Ireland’s progress towards achieving its emission reduction targets out to 2030 set under the EU ESD and Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR).

The EPA has produced two scenarios in preparing these greenhouse gas emissions projections: a “With Existing Measures” (WEM) scenario and a “With Additional Measures” (WAM) scenario. These scenarios forecast Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions in different ways. The WEM scenario assumes that no additional policies and measures, beyond those already in place by the end of 2020. This is the cut off point for which the latest national greenhouse gas emission inventory data is available, known as the ‘base year’ for projections. The WAM scenario has a higher level of ambition and includes government policies and measures to reduce emissions such as those in Ireland’s Climate Action Plan 2021.

The EPA Emission Projections Update notes the following key trends:

- *Under the With Existing Measures scenario, the projections indicate that Ireland will cumulatively exceed its ESR emissions allocation of 384.3 Mt CO₂ eq by 78.3 Mt CO₂ eq over the 2021-2030 period without the use of flexibilities. If both the LULUCF and ETS flexibilities are used the exceedance will reduce to 52.3 Mt CO₂ eq.*
- *Under the With Additional Measures scenario, the projections indicate that Ireland will cumulatively exceed the ESR emissions allocation by 24.2 Mt CO₂ eq over the 2021-2030 period.*
- *The projections show that Ireland can achieve compliance under the ESR (in the With Additional Measures scenario) – using both flexibilities but only with implementation of the Climate Action Plan 2021. Using both flexibilities gives a surplus under the ESR of only 1.6 Mt CO₂ eq, this is a small amount of headroom and only highlights the need for full and rapid implementation of policies and measures in the Climate Action Plan 2021.*

2.1.1.3 Summary of Compliance with Climate Change Policy

The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development represents a significant opportunity to be a nationally important wind energy generator, contributing to the 51% reduction in emissions being sought, which is as outlined above a legally binding requirement. At present Ireland faces significant challenges through efforts to meet its EU targets for renewable energy by 2030 and its commitment to transition to a low carbon economy by 2050. The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development can significantly aid Ireland meeting its energy and climate targets along with addressing the country’s over-dependence on imported fossil fuels by facilitating the connection of an approved renewable energy development to the national grid. As such, there is a strong policy support for the Proposed Development as it will allow the construction and connection to the national grid of a permitted renewable energy generator, which will facilitate greater penetration of renewable energy on to the grid in order to assist with national decarbonisation efforts.

2.1.1.4 Renewable Energy Policy and Targets

Renewable energy development is recognised as a vital component of Ireland’s strategy to tackle the challenges of combating climate change and ensuring a secure supply of energy. Ireland’s import dependency was 67% in 2018, down from an average of 89% between 2001 and 2015, arising from the beginning of production of gas from the Corrib field and increasing use of indigenous renewable energy. Notwithstanding this improvement, Ireland remains one of the most import fuel dependent countries in the EU; specifically, oil accounted for 73% of total energy imports, natural gas 17%, coal

8.2% and renewables 1.4%⁵. SEAI's 'Energy in Ireland – 2020 Report' (December 2020) further expands upon the above analysis, noting that “*Oil has by far the largest share of final energy use at 57% in 2019, more than all other fuel types combined. Transport and home heating account for 86% of oil use.*” The most significant changes noted in the report in terms of fuels included:

- Fossil fuels accounted for 87% of all the energy used in Ireland in 2019. Demand for fossil fuels fell by 3% in 2019, and was 17% lower than in 2005;
- Coal use decreased by 53% in 2019 and its share of total primary energy requirement fell to 2.6%, down from 10.5% in 201;
- Total renewable energy increased by 10.3% during 2019. Hydro and wind increased by 28% and 16% respectively. The overall share of renewables in primary energy stood at 11.2% in 2019, up from 10% in 2018;
- Ireland returned to being a net importer of electricity in 2019 for the first time since 2015, importing 55 ktoe.

This high dependency on energy imports is highly risky and Ireland is currently extremely vulnerable both in terms of meeting future energy needs and ensuring price stability. Against this backdrop, the SEAI states that,

“The development of indigenous, distributed renewable energy sources mitigates many of the risks associated with relying on global supply chains and large single pieces of infrastructure, and reduces the exposure to fossil fuel price shocks.”

The Programme for Government (2020) also highlights the need for a clean and reliable supply of energy:

“Energy will play a central role in the creation of a strong and sustainable economy over the next decade. The reliable supply of safe, secure and clean energy is essential in order to deliver a phase-out of fossil fuels. We need to facilitate the increased electrification of heat and transport. This will create rapid growth in demand for electricity which must be planned and delivered in a cost-effective way.”

The projected demand for electricity is clear and to meet that demand viable projects such as that the Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development can directly contribute to Ireland's energy and climate targets.

2.1.1.5 EU Legislation

The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework (adopted by EU leaders in October 2014) represents the current governance system underpinning EU renewable energy policy. The framework defines EU wide renewable energy targets, which builds on the 2020 climate and energy package:

- A binding commitment at EU level of at least 40% domestic Green House Gas reduction by 2030 compared to 1990;
- An EU wide, binding target of at least 27% renewable energy by 2030; and
- An indicative EU level target of at least 27% energy efficiency by 2030.

The European Commission published its proposal for an Effort Sharing Regulation on the allocation of national targets for greenhouse gas emissions for the period 2021-2030 in May 2018. The Effort Sharing legislation forms part of a set of policies and measures on climate change and energy that will help move Europe towards a low-carbon economy and increase its energy security. Under the current

⁵ SEAI 'Energy Security in Ireland – 2020 Report' (September 2020)

Regulation, the national targets will collectively deliver a reduction of around 10% in total EU emissions from the sectors covered by 2020 and of 30% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

The proposal implements EU commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change (COP21), discussed above in Section 2.1.1.1, and marks an important milestone in the allocation to Member States of a package of climate targets formally adopted as part of the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework.

The revised Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001 came into force in December 2018. It establishes a binding EU target of at least 32% for 2030 with a review for increasing this figure in 2023. The revised Directive sets a 2030 target of 32.5% energy from renewable sources with a potential upward revision in 2023.

The European Green Deal was launched in December 2019 and proposes to increase the binding target of renewable sources in the EU's energy mix from 32% to **40% by 2030** via amendments to the Renewable Energy Directive (Renewable Energy Directive) as per the 'Fit for 55' package (July 2021)⁶. This supports Member States in making the most of their cost-effective renewable energy potential across sectors through a combination of sectoral targets and measures. It aims at making the energy system cleaner and more efficient by fostering renewables-based electrification and, in sectors such as industry and transport where this is more difficult, it will promote the uptake of renewable fuels.

Energy Roadmap 2050

The Energy Roadmap 2050 was published by the European Commission in 2011 and analyses the transition of the contemporary energy system in ways that would be compatible with the greenhouse gas reductions targets as set out in the Renewable Energy Directive (Directive 2009/28/EC) while also increasing competitiveness and security of supply. To achieve these targets and objectives, the Roadmap states that significant investments will need to be made in new low-carbon technologies and renewable energy, e.g. wind energy infrastructure, energy efficiency and grid infrastructure. Five main routes are identified to achieving a more sustainable, competitive and secure energy system in 2050:

- High Energy Efficiency;
- Diversified Supply Technologies;
- High Renewable Energy Sources;
- Nuclear energy; and
- Carbon capture and storage.

The analysis found that decarbonising the energy system is technically and economically feasible. The Roadmap notes that all scenarios show the biggest share of energy supply technologies in 2050 comes from renewables. In this regard, it should be noted that the Climate Change Advisory Council states within their 2020 Annual Review (September 2020) that, "*while the share of renewable electricity generation, particularly wind, is increasing [in Ireland], the [overall] pace of decarbonisation of the [electricity generation] sector needs to accelerate*", as it is not compatible with a low-carbon transition to 2050. As such, a major prerequisite for a more sustainable and secure energy system is a higher share of renewable energy up to and beyond 2030 to 2050. Each of the scenarios assumes in the analysis that increasing the share of renewable energy and using energy more efficiently are crucial, irrespective of the particular energy mix chosen.

⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/>

Progress on Targets

The SEAI *Renewable Energy in Ireland 2020 Update* was published in April 2020 and set out the most recent updates to Ireland's progress towards its binding European and National renewable energy targets. Based on confirmed 2018 data, the primary conclusion of the report relates to Ireland's overall renewable energy supply representing 11% of gross final consumption (EU target of 16%). Against this backdrop, Ireland had the second lowest progress to meeting the overall RES target of all EU Member States (26th out of the EU-28). With regard to Ireland's national renewable energy target for 2020, the 2018 data indicates that Ireland is not on track to meet any of its 2020 renewable energy targets:

- 33.2% renewable electricity by 2020 (target is 40%) - up from 30.1% in 2017;
- 6.5% renewable heat by 2020 (target is 12%); and
- 7.2% renewable transport by 2020 (target is 10%).

The Climate Change Advisory Council notes within their *2019 Annual Review* that while the share of renewable electricity generation, particularly wind, is increasing in Ireland, the pace of decarbonisation of the electricity generation sector is not compatible with a low-carbon transition to 2050. As such, Ireland can continue to 'comply' with EU targets by purchasing emission allowances; however, the expenditure of public funds to do so would not result in any domestic benefit, and furthermore, would result in a more difficult and expensive challenge for the county to meet its future 2030 targets and beyond. The *Review* concludes that continued and additional investment in capacity and technologies in the renewable energy sector is required to reach these said targets.

Drawing on the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework EirGrid's '*All Island Generation Capacity Statement 2021 – 2030*' (September 2021) states that the national power system will require unprecedented change over this decade, "*a fundamental transition for our electricity sector*", in order to accommodate at least 70% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030. The retiring of traditional fossil fuel plant (coal, peat and oil-fired generators), c. 1,650MW of generation over the next 5-years within Ireland, further emphasises the need for a deliberate and swift transition to a low-carbon power system based on renewable energy, natural gas and ancillary supporting infrastructure. With regard to wind energy, the *All Island Generation Capacity Statement 2021 – 2030* states that,

"It can be assumed that Ireland's renewable targets will be achieved largely through the deployment of additional wind powered generation."

New onshore wind farms commissioned in Ireland in 2020 brought the total wind capacity to 4,300MW, contributing to the increase in overall RES percentage to 43.3%. This value is set to increase as Ireland endeavours to meet its 2030 renewable targets; specifically, the *All Island Generation Capacity Statement 2021 – 2030* estimates that onshore wind energy will increase by 1,000MW between 2020 and 2025. With regard to wind energy, the Statement states that,

"It can be assumed that Ireland's renewable targets will be achieved largely through the deployment of additional wind powered generation."

Long-term system electricity demand in Ireland is increasing and is forecast to increase significantly, due to the expected expansion of many large energy users (e.g. data centres). EirGrid's analysis concludes that, for the Median demand level, there may not be adequate generation capacity to meet demand from 2026 for Ireland should Moneypoint power station close and long term demand continue to rise. In a scenario where any other plant of equivalent capacity closes during this timeframe, earlier deficits could arise. EirGrid also references poor availability of the generation fleet, as exemplified within 2018 and 2019, could give rise to adequacy deficits in 2025. In this context, the importance of wind energy becomes more apparent as it is estimated that 1 MW of wind capacity can provide enough

electricity to supply approximately 650 homes⁷. Accordingly, the Proposed Development will serve to only contribute to meeting this increasing electricity demand.

EirGrid have also released their *Strategy 2020-2025: Transform the Power System for Future Generations* which is driven by climate change and the need to transform the electricity sector. Currently, the electricity grid can operate with up to 65% of renewable power but by 2030 this must increase to 95%. SEAI's National Energy Projections to 2030 notes that wind energy deployment has "made the most significant contribution to RES-E to date. The historic build rate (2005-2010) was 180MW per year. Since 2010 the build rate has increased to an average of over 200MW per year. In 2017 the installed capacity increased by 335MW to just over 3.3GW total installed capacity." Furthermore, "Post 2020, as electricity demand continues to grow at an anticipated rate of 3% per annum, increasing levels of deployment will be needed just to maintain the share achieved in 2020."

The Proposed Development, through facilitating the connection of the Permitted Development to the national grid, will continue Ireland's push towards meeting the various statutory targets.

2.1.1.6 National Policy on Renewable Energy

White Paper on 'Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future' 2015 - 2030

On 12th May 2014, the Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland was launched which marked the start of a public consultation process on the future of Ireland's energy policy over the medium to long-term. The Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment acknowledged that energy is an integral part of Ireland's economic and social landscape and that "a secure, sustainable and competitive energy sector is central to Ireland's ability to attract and retain Foreign Direct Investment and sustain Irish enterprise. The three key pillars of energy policy are to focus on security, sustainability and competitiveness".

Following on from an extensive consultation process, a Government White Paper entitled 'Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030' was published in December 2015 by the (then) Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources ("DCENR"). This Paper provides a complete energy update and a framework to guide policy up to 2030. The Paper builds upon the White Paper published in 2007 and takes into account the changes that have taken place in the energy sector since 2007.

The policy framework was developed to guide policy and actions that the Irish Government intends to take in the energy sector up to 2030 and also reaching out to 2050 to ensure a low carbon future that maintains Ireland's competitiveness and ensures a supply of affordable energy. The Energy Vision 2050, as established in the White Paper, describes a 'radical transformation' of Ireland's energy system which will result in GHG emissions from the energy sector reducing by between 80% and 95%, compared to 1990 levels. The paper advises that a range of policy measures will be employed to achieve this vision with emphasis on the generation of electricity from renewable sources, which there are plentiful indigenous supplies and increasing the use of electricity and bio energy to heat homes and fuel transport.

In this White Paper, the DCENR acknowledges that onshore wind is one of the cheapest forms of renewable energy in Ireland, stating that:

"Onshore wind continues to be the main contributor (18.2% of total generation and 81% of RES-E in 2014). It is a proven technology and Ireland's abundant wind resource means that a wind

⁷ <https://www.iwea.com/about-wind/faqs>

generator in Ireland generates more electricity than similar installations in other countries. This results in a lower cost of support.”

Furthermore, the White Paper outlines that Solar technology is rapidly becoming cost competitive for electricity, not only compared with other renewables but also compared with conventional forms of generation, it recognises that:

“The deployment of solar in Ireland has the potential to increase energy security, contribute to our renewable energy targets, and support economic growth and jobs.”

National Energy Security Framework

More recently, the National Energy Security Framework (April, 2022) highlights clearly the impacts the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting war has had on Europe’s energy system. The resulting decision by the European Union to phase out the import of Russian gas, oil and coal has brought to the fore the importance of security of supply and how energy policy is designed for long-term resilience. It takes account of the need to decarbonise society and economy, to reduce Ireland’s emissions by 51% over the decade to 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Ireland’s response to the impact of the war on the energy system is structured over three themes, with theme 3 importantly being the ability to reduce our dependency on imported fossil fuels in the context of the phasing out of Russian energy imports from across the EU.

In relation to theme 3 the Framework highlights that replacing fossil fuels with renewables, including wind energy, will be a focus area of work. The Framework calls for “*Supportive policies across Government and State agencies*” which “*can reduce barriers and fast track permitting for renewable energy generation projects. Similarly, renewable energy developers need to match this through taking a leadership role in delivering high quality applications to relevant consenting authorities, meeting project milestones on time and minimising delays.*”

Section 6.4 of the Framework focuses on electricity supply noting that “*any disruption to natural gas or oil supplies has the potential to disrupt the generation and supply of electricity.*” The Framework therefore places emphasis on the importance of ensuring the electricity system is “*as resilient as possible to any disruptions in natural gas supplies.*” *The Framework notes that prior to the war in Ukraine challenges to the security of energy supply in Ireland were already present -in particular with regards the security of electric supply.*

The Framework includes a series of ‘Responses’ identified to ensure the security of energy supply; those of relevance here are:

- Response 25 calls for “*timely connections to the electricity grid*” and states “*Policy should prioritise projects with the highest chance of early delivery and greatest impact on carbon emissions ...*”
- Response 26 acknowledges that increased levels of renewable power and transmission of power from source to areas of demand will require electricity networks (and associated systems) to be reinforced and expanded.

2.2 Planning Context

2.2.1 National Policy

2.2.1.1 National Planning Framework: Project Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published in February of 2018, forms the top tier of the national planning policy structure which establishes the policy context for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and local level development plans. In an effort to move away from developer led development to one informed by the needs and requirements of society up to 2040, a number of objectives and policies have been put in place in order for the country to grow and develop in a sustainable manner.

- Developing a new region-focused strategy for managing growth;
- Linking this to a new 10-year investment plan, the Project Ireland 2040 National Development Plan 2018-2027;
- Using state lands for certain strategic purposes;
- Supporting this with strengthened, more environmentally focused planning at local level;
- and
- Backing the framework up in law with an Independent Office of the Planning Regulator.

The NPF notes that the population of Ireland is projected to increase by approximately 1 million people by 2040 which will result in a population of roughly 5.7 million. This population growth will place further demand on both the built and natural environment. In order to strengthen and facilitate more environmentally focused planning at the local level, the NPF states that future planning and development will need to:

“Tackle Ireland’s higher than average carbon-intensity per capita and enable a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing our country’s prodigious renewable energy potential.”

A key focus throughout the NPF is the fostering of a transition toward a low carbon, climate-resilient society. In this regard, one of the stated key elements of the NPF is an Ireland which has a secure and sustainable renewable energy supply and facilitates the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies. Key features identified in the NPF to facilitate the transition towards a low carbon energy future include:

- A shift from predominantly fossil fuels to predominantly renewable energy sources.
- Increasing efficiency and upgrades to appliances, buildings and systems.
- Decisions around development and deployment of new technologies relating to areas such as wind, smart grids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy.
- Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a low carbon society.

Relevant to the subject development, the **National Strategic Outcome 8** (*Transition to Sustainable Energy*), notes that in creating Ireland’s future energy landscape, new energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary to enable a more distributed energy generation which connects established and emerging energy sources, i.e. renewables, to major sources of demand. The successful transition to a low-carbon power system will depend on the pillars of 1) *Sustainability*, 2) *Security of supply* and 3) *Competitiveness*. A common theme underpinning these pillars is the need for a fit-for-purpose transmission and distribution energy network. Specifically, the NPF states that reinforcement of the distribution and transmission network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of a more renewables focused source of energy across the major demand centres, e.g. the functional purpose of

the extant grid connection. Ireland's national energy policy under **Objective 55** aims to 'promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050'.

An overarching objective of the NPF is to foster a transition toward a low carbon, climate-resilient society, which reflects the policy ethos established at the European level of governance (e.g. climate change and renewable energy targets – Section 2.1). In this regard, one of the key themes of the NPF is the realisation of an Ireland which has a secure and sustainable renewable energy supply and the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies.

The NPF acknowledges that greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector must be reduced by at least 80% by 2050 when compared to 1990 levels while ensuring a secure supply of energy exists. New energy systems and the maintenance / safeguarding of existing grid assets will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables focused energy system required to harness Ireland's considerable indigenous energy sources and "connect the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand".

2.2.1.2 National Development Plan 2021 – 2030

The National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 (NDP) was published on the 4th October 2021 and sets out the major public investment projects identified by Government which are to play a significant role in addressing the opportunities and challenges faced by Ireland over the coming years such as Covid-19, Brexit, housing, health, population growth, and most relevant to the subject development, climate change. Reflecting on the recent publication of the IPCC's 6th Assessment Report, the NDP notes that the Irish Government is fully committed to 'playing its part' to ensure that the worst climate change damage can be avoided, e.g. significant reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions as assisted by the achievement of both European and National renewable energy targets. Specifically, the NDP states that,

"The next 10 years are critical if we are to address the climate crisis and ensure a safe and bright future for the planet, and all of us on it.

The investment priorities included in this chapter [Ch. 13] must be delivered to meet the targets set out in the current and future Climate Action Plans, and to achieve our climate objectives. The investment priorities represent a decisive shift towards the achievement of a decarbonised society, demonstrating the Government's unequivocal commitment to securing a carbon neutral future."

Notwithstanding this, the NDP acknowledges that it is not its role to set out a specific blueprint for the achievement of Ireland's climate targets; but as noted above, facilitate capital investment allocations for the climate and environmental strategic priorities.

One of the NDP's strategic climate priorities is the need for low-carbon, resilient electricity systems; specifically, the plan commits to increasing the share of renewable electricity up to 80% by 2030. This is characterised by the NDP as an 'unprecedented commitment to the decarbonisation of electricity supplies' which, if compared to the extant CAP 2019 and the objective to meet 70% renewable energy share by 2030, is certainly ambitious and an explicit driver for the deployment of new renewable generators and the safeguarding / maintenance of existing assets, e.g. the Permitted Development. It is noted that the reliability of electricity supplies will also be strengthened through investment in the electricity transmission and distribution grid. The focus of investment in regulated network infrastructure is to contribute to a long-term, sustainable and competitive energy future for Ireland.

2.2.2 Regional Policy

2.2.2.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The strategic objectives of the NPF are implemented at a regional level by the Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032. The RSES provides a 12-year strategy to establish “a broad framework for the way in which our society, environment, economy and the use of land should evolve.”

The RSES notes that planning policy and objectives must incorporate resilience and adaptability to ensure that the Region are agile and responsive to change. At present, Irish per capita Green House Gas (GHG) emissions are among the highest in Europe and Government has identified “*Climate Change as the most important long-term challenge facing Ireland*” with a stated commitment to “*the transformation required to achieve a low carbon resilient future*”. Transition to a low carbon energy future will require a wide range of policy responses across industry and public sectors, including electricity.

The RSES recognizes that there is ‘significant potential’ to use renewable energy across the Region to achieve climate change emission reduction targets and notes that “*with costs actively driven down by innovation in solar, onshore and offshore wind in particular, the renewable industry is increasingly cost competitive*”

To achieve national and EU targets in the context of the electricity sector, the RSES notes that further investment is required to develop alternative renewable energies with greater interconnection to energy resources. This key enabling action is captured under Strategic Aim 8 which sets out the need to safeguard and enhance the environment through sustainable development, prioritising action on climate change across the region, driving the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. Both the NPF and RSES emphasise, however, that the planning process is well placed to implement and integrate climate change objectives.

- **RPO 9-Holistic Approach to Delivering Infrastructure:** “*It is an objective to ensure investment and delivery of comprehensive infrastructure packages to meet growth targets that prioritise the delivery of compact growth and sustainable mobility as per the NPF objectives including for renewable energy and climate change adaption.*”

Chapter 5 of the RSES notes details the regions plans and objectives with regards to the environment. The RSES underlines the need to:

“Safeguard and enhance our environment through sustainable development, transitioning to a low carbon and climate resilient society.”

The following objectives have been listed with regards to the decarbonisation of energy:

- **RPO 87- Low Carbon Energy Future:** “*The RSES is committed to the implementation of the Government’s policy under Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-30 and Climate Action Plan 2019. It is an objective to promote change across business, public and residential sectors to achieve reduced GHG emissions in accordance with current and future national targets, improve energy efficiency and increase the use of renewable energy sources across the key sectors of electricity supply, heating, transport and agriculture.*”
- **RPO 88- National Mitigation and National Adaption Framework** “*The RSES is committed to the implementation of the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework:*

Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland to enable the Region transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy. It is an objective to ensure effective co-ordination of climate action with the Climate Action Regional Offices and local authorities to implement the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework in the development and implementation of long-term solutions and extensive adaptation measures.”

In relation to wind energy the RSES recognises and supports the many opportunities for onshore wind as a major source of renewable energy. It is noted that ‘opportunities for both commercial and community wind energy projects should be harnessed, having regard to the requirements of DoHPLG Guidelines on Wind Energy’. It is recognised that wind energy, with current and future developments technology, has an important role in delivering value and clean electricity for Ireland.

The following policies relating to renewable energy development have been included in the RSES:

- **RPO 96- Integrating Renewable Energy Sources** *“It is an objective to support the sustainable development, maintenance and upgrading of electricity and gas network grid infrastructure to integrate a renewable energy sources and ensure our national and regional energy system remains safe, secure and ready to meet increased demand as the regional economy grows.”*
- **RPO 98- Regional Renewable Energy Strategy** *“It is an objective to support the development of a Regional Renewable Energy Strategy with relevant stakeholders.”*
- **RPO 99- Renewable Wind Energy** *“It is an objective to support the sustainable development of renewable wind energy (on shore and offshore) at appropriate locations and related grid infrastructure in the Region in compliance with national Wind Energy Guidelines.”*
- **RPO 100- Indigenous Renewable Energy Production and Grid Injection** *“It is an objective to support the integration of indigenous renewable energy production and grid injection.”*

The RSES sets out a number of infrastructural RPOs, relevant to the Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development which indicate that the Region is open to, and ready to invest in, renewable energy generation:

- **RPO 219 New Energy Infrastructure:** *“It is an objective to support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process) to ensure the energy needs of future population and economic expansion within designated growth areas and across the Region can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner and that capacity is available at local and regional scale to meet future needs.”*
- **RPO 221 Renewable Energy Generation and Transmission Network-** *“All Local Authority City and County Development Plans shall support the sustainable development of renewable energy generation and demand centres such as data centres which can be serviced with a renewable energy source (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process) to spatially suitable locations to ensure efficient use of the existing transmission network”*
- **RPO 222 Electricity Infrastructure:** *“It is an objective to support the development of a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity and to support and facilitate the development of enhanced electricity networks and facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects that might be brought forward in the lifetime of this plan under EirGrid’s (2017) Grid Development Strategy (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process) to serve the existing and future needs of the Region and strengthen all-island energy infrastructure and interconnection capacity.”*

The RSES supports the Southern Region as a Carbon Neutral Energy Region. This policy instrument, if implemented correctly, could assist in facilitating a more consistent approach to renewable energy / wind strategies at the county level. At present, the RSES notes that the Region has more renewable energy generation than demand which indicates a strategic role for the region's energy assets in national energy generation and transmission. With projected increases in population and economic growth, the demand for energy is set to increase in the coming years. In the context of transitioning to a more energy efficient society and increasing renewable sources of energy, the RSES notes that there is a need to set a policy approach which address meeting national targets for renewable electricity generation, climate change and security of energy supplies, both regionally and nationally.

2.2.3 Local Policy

The site falls across the administrative area of both Cork and Kerry County Councils and therefore the provisions of both County Development Plans for these areas must be considered.

2.2.3.1 Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

Cork County Council has recently concluded their Development Plan review process, with the newly adopted Development Plan 2022-2028 coming into force on the 6th June 2022. It should be noted that the Wind Energy Strategy from the previous 2014 Development Plan has not been updated as part of the new Plan.

Section 13.4 recognizes that energy generation in Cork is likely to significantly evolve in the coming years as the move towards a low carbon economy increases and the need to produce more energy from renewable sources grows further. It is noted that Cork is well positioned to become self-sufficient in renewable energy and contribute to the achievement of national energy targets. The following policy objective is relevant:

> ET 13-1 Energy

- a) *Ensure that County Cork fulfils its potential in contributing to the sustainable delivery of a diverse and secure energy supply and to harness the potential of the county to assist in meeting renewable energy targets and managing overall energy demand.*
- b) *During the life of this plan, the Planning Authority will prepare a renewable energy strategy for the county.*

The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development will displace carbon dioxide from fossil fuel-based electricity generation and will therefore assist in reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions that would otherwise arise if the same energy that the Permitted Development will generate were otherwise to be generated by conventional fossil fuel plants. This is a long-term positive effect.

Section 13.8 sets out the Council's consideration in relation to Solar Energy. It is recognized that

"In recent years Solar energy technologies have become more effective and in return have become more viable including solar panels/tubes on roof spaces and commercial development of solar farms through storage facilities."

Section 13.16 of the Development Plan sets out the Council's consideration in relation to Transmission Networks. It is recognized in Section 13.16.1 that

The provision of a secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure and transmission grid is essential to meet the growth in demand and ensure that a reliable electricity supply is available. Cork has a very strong electrical grid and substation network and this network will be instrumental in supporting the development of the renewable energy industry in the county.

In this regard, the following policy objective is identified:

➤ **ET 13-21: Electricity Network**

- a) *Support and facilitate the sustainable development, upgrade and expansion of the electricity transmission grid, storage, and distribution network infrastructure.*
- b) *Support the sustainable development of the grid including strategic energy corridors and distribution networks in the region to international standards.*
- c) *Facilitate where practical and feasible, infrastructure connections to wind farms, solar farms, and other renewable energy sources subject to normal proper planning considerations.*
- d) *Proposals for development which would be likely to have a significant effect on nature conservation-sites and/or habitats or species of high conservation value will only be approved if it can be ascertained, by means of an Appropriate Assessment or other ecological assessment, that the integrity of these sites will not be adversely affected.*

The Council further sets out in Section 13.16.3 that when processing applications involving the siting of electricity power lines, the following should be considered:

- *Avoid areas of high value landscape where practical;*
- *Avoid sites and areas of nature conservation and archaeological interest;*
- *Minimise their visual impact;*
- *Consider the use of underground technology in areas of special sensitivity where appropriate. The best option (underground or overground) for each particular site will be chosen having regard to the particular conditions or sensitivities pertaining to the site*

The following policy objective is identified:

➤ **ET 13-22: Transmission Network**

- a) *To co-operate and liaise with statutory and other energy providers in relation to power generation in order to ensure adequate power capacity for the existing and future needs of the County including business and residential demands.*
- b) *Proposals for new electricity transmission networks will need to consider the feasibility of undergrounding or the use of alternative routes especially in landscape character areas that have been evaluated as being of high landscape sensitivity. This is to ensure that the provision of new transmission networks can be managed in terms of their physical and visual impact on both the natural and built environment and the conservation value of European sites.*
- c) *Proposals for development which would be likely to have a significant effect on nature conservation-sites and/or habitats or species of high conservation value will only be approved if it can be ascertained, by means of an Appropriate Assessment or other ecological assessment, that the integrity of these sites will not be adversely affected.*

Chapter 17 of the CCDP recognises the important necessity to address the causes of climate change by reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

It is the objective of Cork County Council to support the implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy and to facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and reducing CO₂ emissions of the County. Objective **CA 17- 2**, outlines the steps needed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over the Plan period:

In order to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, an increase in renewable energy production, an increase in energy efficiency and enhanced biodiversity, support the transition to a

low carbon, competitive, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 through implementation of the policies of this plan that seek to deliver the following: [inter alia]

- *Renewable energy production and reduced energy consumption*

It is pertinent to note that the Permitted Development (which is facilitated by the Proposed Development), is located within an area deemed ‘Open to Consideration’ for wind energy development. As such, Plan Objective ET 13-5: Wind Energy Projects states:

- *Support a plan led approach to wind energy development in County Cork through the identification of areas for wind energy development. The aim in identifying these areas is to ensure that there are minimal environmental constraints, which could be foreseen to arise in advance of the planning process.*
- *On-shore wind energy projects should focus on areas considered ‘Acceptable in Principle’ and ‘Areas Open to Consideration’ and generally avoid “Normally Discouraged” areas as well as sites and locations of ecological sensitivity.*

County Development Plan Objective ET 13-7: Open to Consideration adds:

- *Commercial wind energy development is open to consideration in these areas where proposals can avoid adverse impacts on:*
 - *Residential amenity particularly in respect of noise, shadow flicker and visual impact;*
 - *Urban areas and Metropolitan/Town Green Belts;*
 - *Natura 2000 Sites (SPA’s and SAC’s), Natural Heritage Areas (NHA’s), proposed Natural Heritage Areas and other sites and locations of significant ecological value. • Architectural and archaeological heritage;*
 - *Visual quality of the landscape and the degree to which impacts are highly visible over wider areas. In planning such development, consideration should also be given to the cumulative impacts of such proposals.*

County Development Plan Objective

- **ET 13-9: National Wind Energy Guidelines**
Development of on-shore wind should be designed and developed in line with the ‘*Planning Guidelines for Wind Farm Development 2006*’ and ‘*Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2019*’ and any relevant update of these guidelines.

2.2.3.2 Landscape Character Assessment - County Cork

Landscape character refers to the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how people perceive this. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement, and creates the particular sense of place found in different areas. Chapter 12 of the EIAR contains a full and detailed landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) of the Proposed Development.

The CCDP includes policies and objectives pertaining to landscape and amenity. *Objective GI 6-3* of the CCDP advises that the Cork County Draft Landscape Strategy (2007) is to be used as a supporting background document to inform planning processes related to landscape. The Draft Landscape Strategy identifies 76 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in the County, amalgamated into a set of 16 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) based on similarities of physical and visual characteristics.

All components of the Proposed Development located within County Cork are situated in LCT 15b – Ridged and Peaked Upland, as shown in Figure 2-2 below. A full description of this LCT and the likely

landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development on LCT15-b are set out in Chapter 12 - Landscape and Visual, while a summary is set out below.

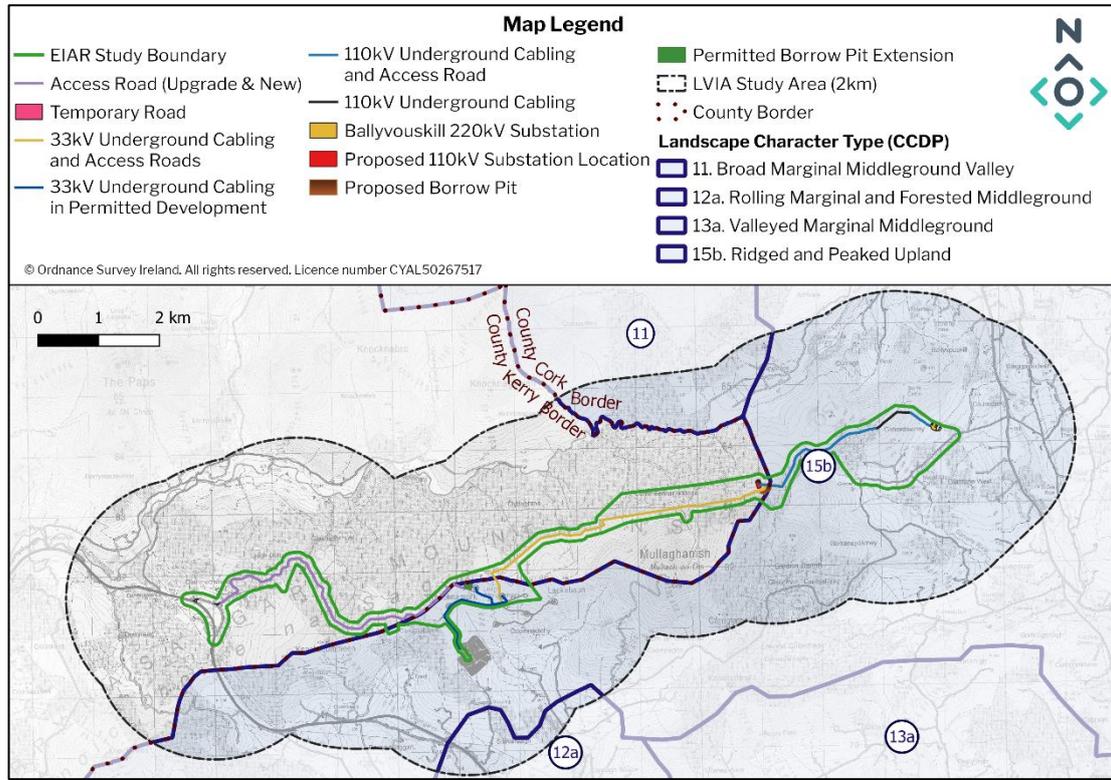


Figure 2-2 Landscape Character Types identified in CCDP

LCT 15b Ridged and Peaked Upland.

The Key Characteristics of this LCT as stated in the Cork County Draft Landscape Strategy (2007) are as follows;

- *“Comprises a rolling mountainous topography at a relatively high elevation and includes the southern slopes of the Boggeragh Mountains.*
- *Soils are of low fertility and experience relatively high levels of rainfall due to its elevation, resulting in poor growing conditions and limited vegetation including moorland, heath and scrub.*
- *Isolated or clusters of fields, are scattered along lower slopes, giving this landscape type a small-scale dimension, to the otherwise open moorland.*
- *Large tracks of coniferous forestry evident particularly in upland areas.*
- *There are patches of fertile land within the landscape.*
- *The main agricultural practice in these upland areas is sheep farming.*
- *Field boundaries comprise mainly stone walls and low hedges.*
- *With forestry over the landscape (not blocks as in other areas). Delineated by tight gorse hedgerows, walls, banks or post and wire fencing and punctuated by a coniferous or broadleaf shelterbelts around small farmsteads.”*

The Draft Landscape Strategy also provides the following description of LCT-15b

“The ridged, peaked and forested upland landscape type which is located south of Millstreet town, includes much of the Millstreet to Macroom road (R582) and swings south west towards the county boundary west of Ballyvourney. This landscape type has been glaciated and comprises a fairly rugged and rolling mountainous topography

at a relatively high elevation. The area around the Boggeragh Mountains provides a good example of this landscape type.

Soils are of low fertility and experience relatively high levels of rainfall due to its elevation and location in the southwest of Ireland, resulting in poor growing conditions and limited vegetation including moorland, heath and scrub.

The landscape, with its rapid and steep rising and falling, seems to tumble down along the valleys. The rugged and diverse landcover, involving moorland, heath and scrub, lends a strong sense of the naturalistic

The ridged, peaked and forested upland landscape type flanks much of the mid-western boundary of County Cork, from the vicinity of Bantry in the south to Millstreet in the north. This landscape type has been glaciated and comprises a fairly rugged and rolling mountainous topography at a relatively high elevation. The area around the Cousane Gap in Type A provides a good example of this landscape type which is inclined towards the rugged whereas the southern slopes of the Boggeragh Mountains further to the north are a somewhat smoother example, thus adding to the small scaled patchwork to the otherwise openness of the moorland. These are often delineated by tight gorse hedgerows, walls, banks or post and wire fencing and punctuated by coniferous or broadleaf shelterbelts around small farmsteads.

The landscape, with its rapid and steep rising and falling, seems to tumble down along the valleys. The rugged and diverse landcover, involving moorland, heath and scrub, lends a strong sense of the naturalistic.”

Landscape Value and Sensitivity– County Cork

Each LCT is assigned a value, sensitivity and importance, which are listed in *Appendix E* of the CCDP. The underground electrical cabling, access road to the proposed 110kV substation and a portion of the proposed borrow pit of the Proposed Development are located in LCT 15b which has the following landscape value, sensitivity and importance designations in the CCDP:

- Landscape Value: Medium
- Landscape Sensitivity: Medium
- Landscape Importance: County

Overall, LCT 15b - Ridged and Peaked Upland is deemed to be an LCA of Medium sensitivity and it is not designated as a County Cork High Value Landscape. The closest High Value landscape is greater than 13 km from the Proposed Development where no significant landscape and visual effects are likely to occur.

Scenic Amenity, Views and Prospects – County Cork.

Chapter 14 of the CCDP, Green Infrastructure and Recreation, sets out overall policies regarding views and prospects and scenic routes as follows:

- Objective GI 14-12: General Views and Prospects
“Preserve the character of all important views and prospects, particularly sea views, river or lake views, views of unspoilt mountains, upland or coastal landscapes, views of historical or cultural significance (including buildings and townscapes) and views of natural beauty as recognized in the Draft Landscape Strategy.”
- Objective GI 14-13: Scenic Routes

“Protect the character of those views and prospects obtainable from scenic routes and in particular stretches of scenic routes that have very special views and prospects identified in this plan. The scenic routes identified in this plan are shown on the scenic amenity maps in the CDP Map Browser and are listed in Volume 2 Chapter 5 Scenic Routes of this plan.”

➤ Objective GI 14-14: Development on Scenic Routes

“(a) Require those seeking to carry out development in the environs of a scenic route and/or an area with important views and prospects, to demonstrate that there will be no adverse obstruction or degradation of the views towards and from vulnerable landscape features. In such areas, the appropriateness of the design, site layout, and landscaping of the Proposed Development must be demonstrated along with along with mitigation measures to prevent significant alterations to the appearance or character of the area

Encourage appropriate landscaping and screen planting of developments along scenic routes which provides guidance in relation to landscaping. See Chapter 12 Heritage Objective HE 46.”

➤ Objective GI 14-15: Development on the approaches to Towns and Villages

“Ensure that the approach roads to towns and villages are protected from inappropriate development, which would detract from the setting and historic character of these settlements.”

Designated scenic routes relevant to the study area include Scenic Route S22 and S23 to the south of the Proposed Development as shown in Figure 2-3 below. These designated routes are within 2km from the proposed 110kV substation; within 400 metres of the 110kV underground cabling and within 1.5 km of the access road (from the N22 national road). A description of these Scenic Routes and the likely landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development upon these visual receptors are assessed in Chapter 12 of the EIAR.

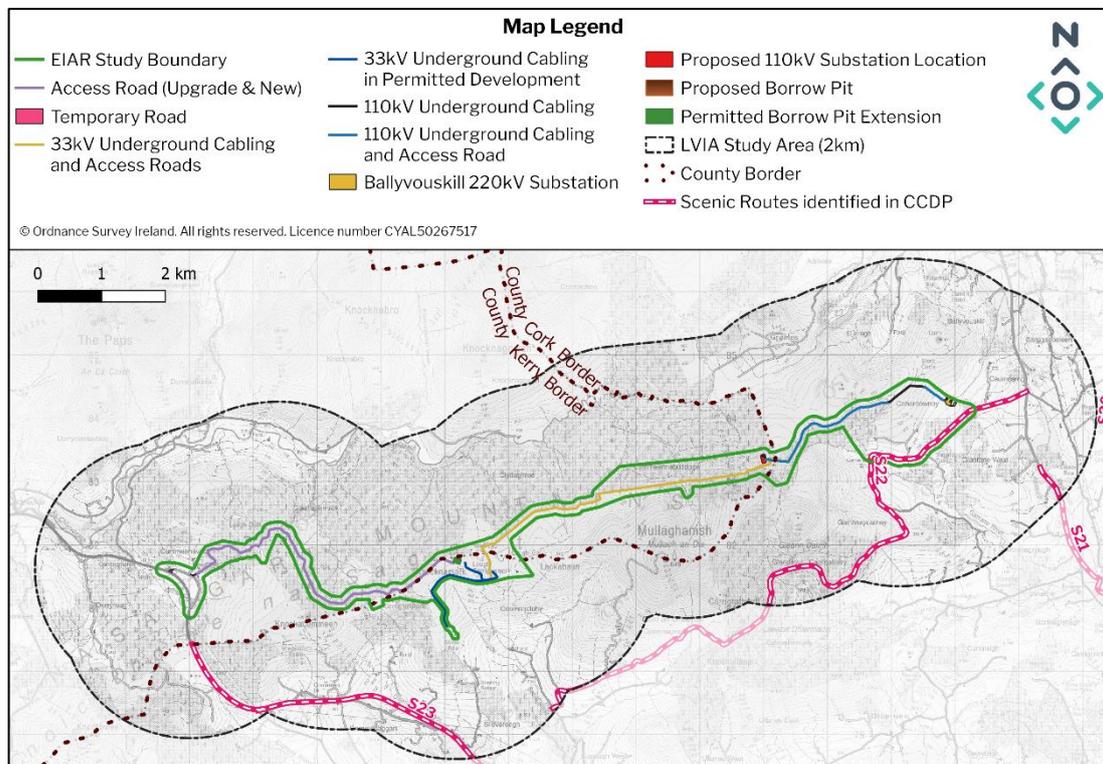


Figure 2-3 Scenic Routes identified in CCDP

2.2.3.3 Summary Conclusion on Local Policy for County Cork

In summary, the Cork County Development Plan fully recognises the importance of tackling climate change and deriving more energy from renewable sources and while the Proposed Development does not include energy generation, it directly facilitates the construction of the Permitted Development and its connection to the national grid.

The Proposed Development, in facilitating the Permitted Development provides the opportunity to capture an additional part of County Cork’s valuable renewable energy resource with minimal infrastructure. If the Proposed Development were not to proceed, the opportunity to capture this additional part of Cork’s valuable renewable energy resource would be lost, as would the opportunity to contribute to meeting Government and EU targets for the production and consumption of electricity from renewable resources and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Proposed Development also supports the provision of a secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure and transmission grid which is vital to ensure that a reliable electricity supply is available.

Accordingly, the Proposed Development is considered to be compliant with the relevant provisions of the extant Development Plan and represents proper planning and sustainable development in the Plan area.

2.2.4 Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021

The Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021 (KCDP) was adopted on the 16th of November 2015. The KCDP acknowledges the importance of having sufficient capacity to meet current and future needs and the essential requirement for energy production and distribution. The development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the County.

Section 2.2.2.5 of the KCDP recognises the Councils' commitment to addressing climate change to mitigate against its adverse effects. The Council is committed to addressing climate change in a proactive manner through the careful consideration of policy guidance and strategies. In this regard, the following policy objective is identified,

➤ **County Development Plan Objective CS-11**

“Support the National Climate Change Strategy and the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework, Building Resilience to Climate Change on an ongoing basis through implementation of supporting objectives in this Plan, particularly those supporting use of alternative and renewable energy sources, sustainable transport, air quality, coastal zone management, flood risk management, soil erosion and promotion of the retention of and planting of trees, hedgerows and afforestation subject to compatibility with environmental designations and legislative requirements.”

Section 7.6.1 of the KCDP sets out the Council’s aim to support and provide for the sustainable development of indigenous energy resources, with an emphasis on renewable energy supplies, in the interests of economic progress and the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. It is recognized that the development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the County.

Substantial work has been carried out on the upgrading of the national grid and the Council supports the sustainable provision for new high voltage electrical infrastructure, including high voltage transformer stations and new overhead transmission power lines further to no significant adverse effects on the environment or Natura 2000 sites.

The Council outlines the importance of ensuring that the capacity of the energy networks is sufficient to meet demands in a sustainable manner. County Kerry is regarded by the Council as being ‘well placed’ to encourage and facilitate the sustainable development of power generation facilities in the county, for a variety of reasons, including the proximity to Cork and Limerick.

In this regard the KCDP states that the Council will,

“... continue to support the infrastructural renewal and sustainable development of electricity and gas networks. The County has in terms of alternative energy, huge potential for the development of wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, hydro and wave energy. The wave and wind resources are among the richest in Europe. Although some wind projects are in production in the County, an objective to maximise the sustainable alternative resources, in accordance with the County’s Renewable Energy Strategy, shall be a priority.”

The following are key objective provisions of the KCDP in relation to renewable energy that relevant to the Proposed Development,

- **Development Plan Objective EP-1**
“Support and facilitate the sustainable provision of a reliable energy supply in the County, with emphasis on increasing energy supplies derived from renewable resources whilst seeking to protect and maintain biodiversity, archaeological and built heritage, the landscape and residential amenity.”
- **Development Plan Objective EP-3**
Facilitate sustainable energy infrastructure provision, so as to provide for the further physical and economic development of the County.
- **Development Plan Objective EP-4**
“Support and facilitate the sustainable development of enhanced electricity and gas supplies, and associated networks, to serve the existing and future needs of the County.”
- **Development Plan Objective EP-7**
“Facilitate the sustainable development of additional electricity generation capacity throughout the region/county and to support the sustainable expansion of the network. National grid expansion is important in terms of ensuring adequacy of regional connectivity as well as facilitating the development and connectivity of sustainable renewable energy resources.”
- **Development Plan Objective EP-8**
Ensure that the siting of electricity power lines is managed in terms of the physical and visual impact of these lines on both the natural and built environment, the conservation value of Natura 2000 sites and especially in sensitive landscape areas. When considering the siting of powerlines in these areas the main technical alternatives considered should be set out, with particular emphasis on the undergrounding of lines, and the identification of alternative routes at appropriate locations. It should be demonstrated that the development will not have significant, permanent, adverse effects on the environment including sensitive landscape areas and the ecological integrity of Natura 2000 sites.

Kerry County Council recognises in Section 7.6.3 that the renewable energy sector is rapidly expanding and is a growing source of employment and investment for the County. In order to facilitate the sustainable growth of renewable energies Kerry County Council prepared and adopted a Renewable Energy Strategy in 2012.

This strategy sets out the development criteria, development management standards and objectives for the development of renewable energy in the County and will be used in the assessment of all planning applications for such development. The following objective is identified in this section,

- **Development Plan Objective EP-11**
Implement the Renewable Energy Strategy for County Kerry (KCC 2012)

2.2.4.1 Kerry Renewable Energy Strategy 2012

The County’s Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) forms part of the adopted Plan. The mission of The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is to “*play a leading role in transforming Ireland into a society based on sustainable energy structures, technologies and practices*”, It is recognized by Kerry County Council that it has a role to play in the delivery of such a society. This strategy has been developed to ensure that the Council, as a Planning Authority, “*actively facilitates, and where possible, drives the development of renewable energy within its functional area.*”

In preparation of the RES, an appraisal of the county’s renewable energy resources and infrastructural capacity was undertaken, it was established that the county has significant potential for the development of renewable energy sources, it is further set out that;

“The existing transmission grid together with current upgrade projects are such that the capacity of the grid will provide for the collection and distribution of significant amounts of electricity. The upgrading of the transmission network was designed primarily to harness wind energy. This capacity, however, also provides the opportunity to connect electricity generated from other types of renewable energy.”

Strategic policy objectives for the development of the renewable energy sector are set out within the strategy which include the following:

- **Objective NR 7-21** *To maximise the development of all renewable energies at appropriate locations in a manner consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. This will include requirements and considerations in relation to: landscape; cultural heritage; Natura 2000 sites and the Habitats & Birds Directive; the objectives of the Water Framework Directive; Flood Directive; Sustainable Forestry Management; and Best Practices in the production of energy crops.*
- **Objective NR 7-22** *To promote the sustainable development of renewable energy types and technologies with the capacity to store energy which can be released at times of peak demand.*
- **Objective NR 7-24** *To secure the maximum potential for the generation of electricity from wind energy resources that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development of the county. This will include requirements and considerations in relation to: landscape; cultural heritage; Natura 2000 sites and the Habitats & Birds Directive; the objectives of the Water Framework Directive; Flood Directive; electricity infrastructure; settlement patterns; and wind energy potential.*

2.2.4.2 Landscape Policy

Sections 12.1 to 12.3 of the KCDP detail the objectives and policies of Kerry County Council in relation to landscape and development. Regarding landscape protection, the Plan sets out the following objective:

- **“ZL 1:** *Protect the landscape of the county as a major economic asset as well as for its invaluable amenity which contributes to the quality of people’s lives.”*

The plan states that a LCA is required for the county, which would have three distinct elements:

- Identification and Classification of Landscape Types.
- Landscape Character Areas.
- Landscape Value and Sensitivity to Development

The KCDP recognises that the sensitivity of a landscape is a measure of its ability to accommodate change or intervention without suffering unacceptable effects to its character. On this basis, the KCDP sets out the following policy regarding zoning of lands in rural areas:

- **ZL 3:** *Determine the zoning of lands in rural areas having regard to the sensitivity of the landscape as well as its capacity to absorb further development.*

All infrastructure of the Proposed Development located within County Kerry are sited in land zoned as Rural Secondary Special Amenity, as shown in Figure 2-4 below.

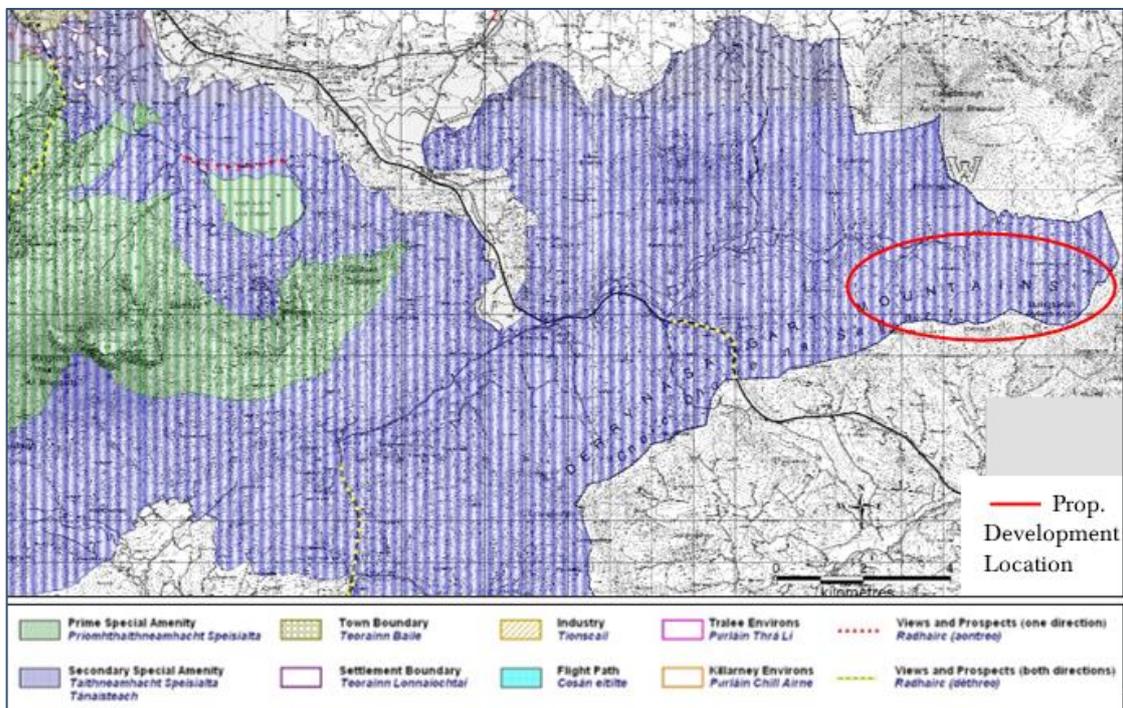


Figure 2-4 Map 12.1 extract from KCDP, adapted to show location of the Proposed Development

There are three categories of rural area zoning designations; Rural Prime Special Amenity, Rural Secondary Special Amenity and Rural General. Rural Prime Special Amenity Areas are defined as follows:

- *These are landscapes which are very sensitive and have little or no capacity to accommodate development. In these areas, all development will be prohibited, other than exempted development in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2013 and Chapter 3.3.2. which will be open to consideration, subject to satisfactory integration into the landscape and compliance with the proper planning and sustainable development in the area.*

Views and Prospects – County Kerry

The following objective of the KCDP relates to views and prospects:

- **ZL-5:** *Preserve the views and prospects as defined on Map No's 12.1, 12.1a– 12.1u*

As shown in Figure 2-4 above as a yellow dotted line, a short length of designated (unnamed) views/prospects are located on the N22 National Road approximately 170 metres southwest of the Proposed Development. The only elements of the Proposed Development potentially visible from this location will be the proposed access road and temporary road associated with the turbine delivery route. A description of this view/prospect and the likely landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development upon the visual amenity of this route are assessed in Chapter 12 - Landscape and Visual.

Landscape Character Assessment – County Kerry

Kerry County Council sets the objectives for the Landscape Character Assessment as:

- **“ZL-2:** Prepare a Landscape Character Assessment of the County following the publication of the proposed National Landscape Strategy. This assessment will include capacity studies for different forms of development and will involve consultation with adjoining local authorities.”

Within the Renewable Energy Strategy (hereafter referred to as RES) prepared by Kerry County Council in 2012, forty-six LCAs were identified. *Map 7.5* of this document shows that all components of the Proposed Development sited within County Kerry are located in LCA 36 ‘*Upper Clydagh River and the Derrynasaggart Mountains*’. LCA 36 is described in the RES as follows:

- **“36. Upper Clydagh River and the Derrynasaggart Mountains**

***Landcover:** The summits and slopes of the mountains comprise moorland or rocky moorland. Coniferous plantations occurs on the slopes of the mountains. There is some rough pasture lower in the valleys.”*

LCA 36 states that the Landscape Type is ‘*Mountain Moorland and Transitional Marginal Land*’, however, these landscape types relate to the entirety of LCA 36. The Proposed Development is inserted in the eastmost boundary of this typology and can be described solely as Mountain Moorland.

Sensitive landscape areas are also identified on the *Map 7.5* LCA 36 as designated sensitive areas. The Proposed Development is not sited within designated sensitive areas. The nearest sensitive landscape area is located northwest of the Proposed Development at approximately 1 kilometre, however no areas in proximity to the Proposed Development in the southern portion of the LCA are marked as sensitive.

2.2.4.3 Draft Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028

The review of the Kerry County Development Plan commenced on 24th June 2020 in accordance with the requirements of Section 11 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), with submissions or observations regarding the Material Alterations to the Draft Kerry County Development Plan (DKCDP) Plan taking place between 18th May to 16th June 2022.

The DCKDP sets out that one of the underpinning goals for the future development of the county include growth of a sustainable and strong economy involving the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. Section 12.5 recognises the importance of access to secure, clean and affordable energy for the future development of the county and states that:

“The Council will continue to support and facilitate the sustainable development of the renewable energy sector in line with the strategic goals set out by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment whilst balancing the need for

new development with the protection of the environmental, cultural and heritage assets of the county.”

In this regard, the following policy objective is identified:

- **KCDP 12-12**
Maximise the development of all renewable energies at appropriate locations in a manner consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.

Furthermore, Section 12.0 sets out that the development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is also recognised as a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the County.

“The Council supports the development of a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity and to support and facilitate the development of enhanced electricity networks and facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects that might be brought forward in the lifetime of this plan under EirGrid’s (2017) Grid Development Strategy.”

In this regard, the following policy objectives are identified which are relevant to the Proposed Development:

- **KCDP 12-6**
Facilitate sustainable energy infrastructure provision, so as to provide for the further physical and economic development of the county.
- **KCDP 12-7**
Support and facilitate the sustainable development of enhanced electricity and gas supplies, additional electricity generation capacity, and associated networks, to serve the existing and future needs of the county.
- **KCDP 12-8**
Ensure that the siting of electricity power lines is managed in terms of the physical and visual impact of these lines on both the natural and built environment, the conservation value of Natura 2000 sites and especially in sensitive landscape areas. When considering the siting of powerlines in these areas, consideration will be given to undergrounding or the selection of alternative routes.
- **KCDP 12-9**
Support the sustainable implementation of EirGrid’s Grid 25 Investment Programme (and successor programme), subject to landscape, residential, amenity and environmental considerations.

In relation to Solar Energy, Section 12.5.4.2 sets out that:

“The Council will continue to support and facilitate the sustainable development of solar energy (USSPV) in appropriate locations, encourage passive solar design and solar water heating in new buildings and in retrofitting buildings, including agricultural buildings.”

In this regard, the following policy objective is identified:

- **KCDP 12-21**
Facilitate USSPV where it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the planning authority that there will be no significant adverse impact on the built and natural environment, the visual character of the landscape, or on residential amenity.

Landscape Policy

New draft landscape designations for County Kerry, described in the Draft Kerry County Development Plan combine the existing Rural Primary and Rural Secondary Special Amenity Areas into one classification called ‘Visually Sensitive Areas’. Therefore, the Proposed Development components will be located within this visually sensitive area.

According to the Draft Development Plan, ‘Visually Sensitive Areas’ can be defined as:

“Visually sensitive landscape areas comprise the outstanding landscapes throughout the County which are sensitive to alteration. Rugged mountain ranges, spectacular coastal vistas and unspoilt wilderness areas are some of the features within this designation.

These areas are particularly sensitive to development. In these areas, development will only be considered subject to satisfactory integration into the landscape and compliance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.”

The following provisions are requested by KCC to development in Visually Sensitive Landscapes Areas under the Draft Development Plan, in section 11.6.4

“There is no alternative location for the proposed development in areas outside of the designation.

Individual proposals shall be designed sympathetically to the landscape and the existing structures and shall be sited so as not to have an adverse impact on the character, integrity and distinctiveness of the landscape or natural environment.

Any proposal must be designed and sited so as to ensure that it is not unduly obtrusive. The onus is, therefore, on the applicant to avoid obtrusive locations. Existing site features including trees and hedgerows should be retained to screen the development.”

In relation to Landscape Character Assessment, the Draft Kerry County Development Plan (2022-2028) identifies a total of 40 LCA’s, however, although there is a reduction in LCAs in the new draft document, the Proposed Development is still located within the landscape character of “Clydagh River, The Paps and the Derrynasaggart Mountains” which is cognisance of the Renewable Energy Strategy (2012).

2.2.4.4 Summary Conclusion on Local Policy for County Kerry

In summary, the Kerry County Development Plan recognizes the importance of addressing climate change in order to mitigate against its adverse effects and acknowledges the importance of having sufficient capacity to meet current and future needs and the essential requirement for energy production and distribution. The development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the County.

The overarching policy stance is one of support for continued decarbonisation, while emerging planning policy, at this early stage, appears to be in alignment with this stance. The Proposed Development by facilitating the Permitted Development will contribute to meeting Government and EU targets for the production and consumption of electricity from renewable resources and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Proposed Development will also facilitate the sustainable development of additional electricity generation capacity throughout the region/county and to support the sustainable expansion of the network.

There is a range of policy in place within the current and draft county plans which strongly supports the development and continued supply of renewable energy onto the national grid. Accordingly, the Proposed Development is consistent with the aims and objectives of the Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021.

2.2.5 Other Relevant Material Considerations

DoEHLG Wind Energy Guidelines 2006

In June 2006, the then Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) published 'Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (the Guidelines) under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. The aim of these guidelines was to assist the proper planning of wind power projects in appropriate locations around Ireland. The Guidelines highlight general considerations in the assessment of all planning applications for wind energy. They set out advice to planning authorities on planning for wind energy through the development plan process and in determining applications for planning permission and contain guidelines to ensure consistency of approach throughout the country in the identification of suitable locations for wind energy development.

Section 6.11 of the Guidelines considers the landscape impacts of associated development. It states: (inter alia)

- *A high standard of design should be applied to all structures associated with the substation.*
 - The control building of the Proposed Development has been sensitively sited and designed in line with EirGrid's specifications.
- *Fencing should be limited to the substation compound area*
 - Fencing is proposed at the substation location however it has been included also at the borrow pit locations where necessary for Health & Safety purposes
- *Power line connections between turbines and from turbines to the control building should be underground.*
 - This has been achieved with all the Proposed Development cabling running underground
- *In certain landscapes, such as highly sensitive Mountain Moorland, consideration should be given to burying the cables until such a distance as the poles and cables would be visually acceptable, for example, where other power lines exist.*
 - The Proposed Development includes for underground cabling only thus avoiding significant landscape impacts.
- *In order to reduce visual impact, connections should preferably be carried on wooden poles rather than lattice towers, except where necessary for changes in direction and within the compound.*
 - No such connections are required under the Proposed Development
- *The number and extent of roads/tracks serving the site should be kept to a minimum. Access routes should utilise existing roads where possible.*
 - The Proposed Development utilises existing roads and tracks as far as possible to reduce the extent of new roads/tracks in the vicinity of the Proposed Development.

It is concluded that the extant Wind Energy Guidelines are accorded with.

DoHPCLG Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change 2017

In July 2017, the (then) Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DoHPCLG) published 'Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable

Energy and Climate Change’ under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Planning authorities are obliged to have regard to guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The guidelines state that it is a specific planning policy requirement under Section 28(1C) of the Act, that in making a development plan with policies or objectives that relate to wind energy developments that a Planning Authority must:

- *Ensure that overall national policy on renewable energy as contained in documents such as the Government’s ‘White Paper on Energy Policy - Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Future’, as well as the ‘National Renewable Energy Action Plan’, the ‘Strategy for Renewable Energy’ and the ‘National Mitigation Plan’, is acknowledged and documented in the relevant development plan or local area plan;*
- *Indicate how the implementation of the relevant development plan or local area plan over its effective period will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation, and in particular wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource (in megawatts); and*

It is concluded that the Proposed Development aligns with the provisions of the Development Plans of both County Cork and County Kerry which in turn which accord with the DoHPCLG Interim Guidelines

Department Circular PL5/2017

On the 3rd of August 2017, the (then) Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government issued Circular PL5/2017 to provide an update on the review of the wind energy and renewable policies in development plans, and the advice contained within a previous Departmental Circular PL20-13. Circular PL20-13 advised that local authorities should defer amending their existing Development Plan policies in relation to wind energy and renewable energy generally as part of either the normal cyclical six-yearly review or plan variation processes and should instead operate their existing development plan policies and objectives until the completion of a focused review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006. The new circular (PL05/2017) reconfirms that this continues to be the advice of the Department. The Department circular also sets out the four key aspects of the *preferred draft approach* being developed to address the key aspects of the review of the 2006 Wind Energy guidelines as follows inter alia:

- The introduction of new obligations in relation to engagement with local communities by wind farm developers along with the provision of community benefit measures.

It is concluded that the Proposed Development aligns with the provisions of the Department Circular, as relevant.

IWEA Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry 2012

The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) (now Wind Energy Ireland) published updated Wind Energy Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Industry in 2012. The guidelines aim to encourage and define best practice development in the wind energy industry, acting as a reference document and guide to the main issues relating to wind energy developments. The purpose of the guidelines is to encourage responsible and sensitive wind energy development, which takes into consideration the concerns of local communities, planners, and other interested groups. The guidelines outline the main aspects of wind energy development with emphasis on responsible and sustainable design and environmental practices, on aspects of development which affect external stakeholders, and on good community engagement practices. In approaching the development of IWEA’s guidelines the aim was to be complementary to the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government’s ‘Wind Energy Development Guidelines’ (2006).

The applicant has undertaken significant community consultation and stakeholder engagement, please refer to Section 2.5.2 for full details.

IWEA Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment 2013

IWEA extended its guidance with the publication of this Best Practice in Community Engagement and Commitment. IWEA and its members support the provision of financial contributions by wind farm operators to local communities and have sought to formulate best practice principles for the provision of a community commitment. The document sets out IWEA's best practice principles for delivering extended benefits to local communities for wind farm developments of 5 Megawatts (MW) or above. Best Practice Principles of community engagement when planning the engagement strategy and preparing associated literature are also outlined in the document. The aim of these guidelines is to ensure that the views of local communities are taken into account at all stages of a development and that local communities can share in the benefits.

In December 2016, the (then) Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) issued a Code of Practice for wind energy development in relation to community engagement. The Code of Good Practice is intended to ensure that wind energy development in Ireland is undertaken in adherence with the best industry practices, and with the full engagement of local communities. Community engagement is required through the different stages of a project, from the initial scoping, feasibility and concept stages, right through construction to the operational phase. The methods of engagement should reflect the nature of the project and the potential level of impact that it could have on a community. The guidelines advise that ignoring or poorly managing community concerns can have long-term negative impacts on a community's economic, environmental or social situation. Not involving communities in the project development process has the potential to impose costly time and financial delays for projects or prevent the realisation of projects in their entirety. Community engagement in relation to the Proposed Development is discussed in full in Section 2.5.2.

Commission for Regulation of Utilities: Grid Connection Policy

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) (previously the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER)) launched a new grid connection policy in March 2018 for renewable and other generators, known as ECP-1, which seeks to allow "shovel ready" projects that already have a valid planning permission, connect to the electricity networks. The principal objective which guides this decision is to allow those projects to have an opportunity to connect to the network, along with laying the foundations for future, more regular batches for connection. August 2018 saw the applicants for new connection capacity under ECP-1 published. ECP-2 was launched in June of 2020, with ECP-2.1 applications submitted in September 2020. ECP-2.2 applications were due in September 2021 and ECP-2.3 applications are scheduled for September 2022.

The enduring connection policy regime replaces the previous 'Gate' system of grid connection applications. The grid connection application window under ECP-1 was the first time since 2007 that certain renewable energy projects including wind farms had an opportunity to secure a new grid connection offer.

It is noted that the Permitted Development received a grid offer (ECP2.1) in September 2021 for 54.5MW (42 wind and 12.5 solar) under Planning Ref No. 19/4972.

Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS)

The Climate Action Plan 2021 is the Government's plan to give Irish people a cleaner, safer and more sustainable future to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050. The Plan sets out

actions across every sector which will ensure we meet our future climate commitments. A key part of the Plan is to achieve at least 70% of electricity demand from renewable sources and to increase the share of electricity demand generated from renewable sources to up to 80% by 2030. These measures will be driven by introduction of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (“RESS”) which aims to promote the generation of electricity from renewable sources.

The RESS is an auction-based scheme which invites renewable electricity projects to bid for capacity and receive a guaranteed price for the electricity they generate.

The Auction Scheme and the ECP framework has now been established and is operational and will facilitate and provide a pathway to realise Ireland’s ambition of up to 80% renewable electricity by 2030, and an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% by that date also.

It is noted that the Permitted Development was a successful applicant in RESS 2 for wind and solar.

2.2.5.2 Draft Guidelines

DoEHLG Wind Energy Guidelines 2006 (Revisions)

Further to information set out in Section 3.2.5 in relation to the 2006 Wind Energy Guidelines it should be acknowledged that the (then) Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government published proposed revisions to the guidelines in December 2013 as part of a targeted review relating to Noise, Proximity and Shadow Flicker for discussion. Revisions to the Wind Energy Guidelines continue to be considered and draft revisions were published in December 2019, these are further discussed below.

Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines, December 2019

The (then) Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government published the *Draft Wind Energy Guidelines* (referred to as the Draft Revised Guidelines) in December 2019 and these Draft Guidelines were under public consultation until 19th February 2020. Following the previous 2013 consultation and subsequent detailed engagement between the relevant Government Departments, a “preferred draft approach” to inform and advance the conclusion of the review of the 2006 guidelines was announced in June 2017.

In line with the previously stated “*preferred draft approach*”, the 2019 Draft Guidelines primarily focus on addressing a number of key aspects including, but not limited to:

- Acceptable noise thresholds and monitoring frameworks;
- Visual amenity setback and spacing;
- Control of shadow flicker;
- Compliance with Community consultation and dividend requirements, as included within the obligatory Community Report; and
- Consideration of the siting, route and design of the proposed grid connection as part of the whole project.

Similar to the 2006 Guidelines, the Draft Revised Guidelines also state that underground grid connections for wind energy projects are considered the most appropriate environmental and/or engineering solution (e.g. default approach), particularly in sensitive landscapes.

There is, at the time of writing, no timeframe associated with the formalisation of the Revised Guidelines.

2.3 Planning History

This Section of the EIAR sets out the relevant planning history of the Proposed Development site, planning applications in the vicinity of the site and other wind energy applications within the wider area. For the purposes of reviewing and stating the relevant planning history for this project the following criteria have been adopted in relation to the various elements of the Proposed Development:

1. All planning applications which overlap or are within the planning application boundary of the current Proposed Development made within the last 5 years have been identified (listed in Table 2-1 below).
2. A buffer zone of 1 kilometre was established from the planning application boundary of the Proposed Development to identify other wind farm applications. This distance has been derived on a highly precautionary basis following an assessment of the nature and scale of the works and considering the lack of a pathway for significant cumulative effects to occur as a result of the proposed works at distances greater than 1km. It reflects the fact that the Proposed Development forms part of a larger wind development project and assess the other similar developments in the vicinity.
3. A buffer zone of 200 metres was established from the planning application boundary of the Proposed Development to identify other planning applications made within the last 5 years not related to wind energy developments. This distance was derived based on the nature and scale of both the Proposed Development and the surrounding planning applications, it was considered that there is no potential for significant cumulative effects to occur at a distance of over 200m and this was an appropriate and conservative zone of influence to consider.

2.3.1 Applications Within the Proposed Development Site

Planning applications which are recorded as being within the application redline boundary are set out in Table 2-1 below.

Table 2-1 Planning Applications within redline boundary made within the last 5 years.

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
18/6438	The proposed development will comprise the construction of one (1) no. ± 100 Mvar STATCOM transformer, one (1) no. auxiliary transformer, three (3) no. reactors, one (1) no. outdoor cooling bank, control and valve building (268m ²), underground connection to existing ESB substation. It further includes security fencing, security gate, four (4) no. 25m high lightning masts, permeable surfacing, and an internal access road. There will also be the construction of one (1) no. temporary contractors' compound. The development is an extension to the existing substation and the overall site area (within the planning application boundary) is 0.73ha. Access is provided via a local road (L5226) onto the R582.	Granted by CCC 07/03/2019
18/4182	A battery energy storage facility which will comprise of rechargeable battery units contained within up to 39 No. 40 foot containers on site and the associated development of unit substations, a 110 kV substation and associated site works.	Granted by CCC 15/01/2019
20/5281	Proposed modifications to the previously permitted development (planning ref: 18/06438 granted on 7th March 2019).The proposed modifications will comprise	Granted by CCC 21/09/2020

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
	the additional construction of one (1) harmonic filter, one (1) HV circuit breaker (including CT and VT), one (1) MV disconnecter and earth switch, two (2) cable sealing ends, three (3) additional lightning masts (approximately 25m high) and additional lamppost lightning. It further includes a retaining wall (approximately 2.5m high), asphalt (non-permeable) surfacing, additional permanent access road, additional fencing to match existing 2.6m high palisade, additional permanent access gate and all other ancillary site development works. The development will remain an extension to the existing substation and this extension will have an overall site area (within the planning application boundary) of 0.73ha. Access will continue to be provided via a L5226 and the R582.	

Relevant cumulative wind energy projects are considered to be those within 1km of the Proposed Development, those that have not been listed previously in Table 2-1 (above) are listed in Table 2-2 below.

Table 2-2 Wind Energy Applications Within 1km Application Boundary

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
Clydaghroe Wind Farm – Currently Operational		
04/3152	Develop a Wind Farm to include 2 wind turbines and service roadways. An Environmental Impact Statement has been included.	Granted by KCC 16/11/2004
06/1680	Construct a wind farm, the development will consist of two wind turbines, two transformers, a control and metering building, a meteorological mast, site tracks and all associated works.	Granted by KCC 11/08/2006
06/91680	Extension of Duration – Complete Windfarm.	Granted by KCC 05/07/2011
07/306	The development will consist of 1 wind turbine and service roadway. EIS Submitted.	Granted by KCC 25/04/2007
10/1302	Construct a single turbine extension to an existing three turbine wind farm.	Refused by KCC Granted by An Bord Pleanála (Ref: 238677) 21/07/2011
Caherdowney Wind Farm – Currently Operational		
03/3079	Windfarm to include 4 no. turbines, meteorological mast, transformers, 38kv substation, control building, site tracks and associated works.	Granted by CCC 31/10/2003 Fully constructed
08/9493	Extension of Duration - Completion of windfarm to include 4 no. turbines, meteorological mast, transformers, 38kv substation, control building, site tracks and associated works granted under pl.reg.no. 03/3079 (New permission to expire on 30/10/2011).	Granted by CCC 05/12/2008

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
11/4391	Extension of Duration - Completion of windfarm to include 4 no. turbines, meteorological mast, transformers, 38KV substation, control building, site tracks and associated works permitted under Planning Reg. Nos. 03/3079 and subsequently extended under Planning Reg. No. 08/9493.	Granted by CCC 26/04/2011.
Curragh Wind Farm – Currently Operational		
07/10105	Windfarm development comprising of 8 no. wind turbines, substation, meteorological mast, associated access roads, borrow pit and associated works.	Granted by CCC 21/08/2008.
Gneeves Wind Farm – Currently Operational		
99/616	15.6 MW windfarm to incl. 13 turbines, 45m high measuring mast, control building, hard standing areas, compound, access roads, signs & anc. site works.	Granted by CCC 15/09/1999
03/6585	Modifications to windfarm permitted under Reg. No. N/99/0616 to include increase of the turbine height from 44m to 65m.	Granted by CCC 29/03/2004
04/188	Extension to windfarm permitted under reg. no. N/99/0616 to consist of 4 no. wind turbines (hub height 65m, blade tip 91m), construction of an extension of internal site tracks and associated works.	Granted by CCC 16/08/2004
08/5636	Extension of Duration - Completion of wind farm (13 no. turbines) granted under pl. reg. no. 99/0616 and modified under pl. reg. no. 03/6585.	Granted by CCC 01/07/2008
13/4566	Completion of windfarm (13 no. turbines), extension of duration to permission granted under Planning Reg. No. N/99/0616, modified under Planning Reg. No 03/6585 and which received an extension of duration under Planning Reg. No. 08/5636.	Granted by CCC 24/05/2013
13/5717	Ten year planning permission for an extension to existing Gneeves Wind Farm (Planning Refs. 99/0616, 03/6585, 04/1355, 04/0188, 08/5636, 13/4566). The proposed extension will comprise of 3no. turbines (each with a maximum tip height of 91m), a borrow pit, new internal access roads, upgrading of existing internal access roads, underground cables, an extension to the existing substation building with a wastewater holding tank and ancillary works.	Granted by CCC

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
Knocknamork Wind Farm – Not yet constructed		
19/4972	Renewable energy development consisting of the provision of a 7 turbine wind farm, solar photovoltaic array, electricity substation, battery storage compound and all associated works consisting of the following, i. Up to 7 wind turbines with an overall blade tip height of up to 150 metres and all associated foundations and hard-standing areas; ii. Up to 70,000sq.m solar photovoltaic array, with up to 17 associated inverters and 2 no. control cabins; iii. 1 no. borrow pit, iv. 1 No. permanent meteorological mast with a maximum height of up to 100 meters; v. Upgrade of existing and provision of new site access roads, vi. 1 no. 38kV electrical substation with 1 no. control building with welfare facilities, associated electrical plant and equipment security fencing and waste water holding tank; vii battery storage compound accommodating 4 no. battery storage containers, security fencing, and associated electrical plant and equipment, viii. Forestry felling ix. 1 no. temporary construction compound, x. Site drainage xi. All associated internal underground cabling; xii. 38kV underground grid connection cabling; xiii. All associated site development and ancillary works. The proposed development will have an operational life of 30 years from the date of commissioning of the development and the application seeks a ten year planning permission.	Granted by CCC 18/11/2019.

Table 2-3 below sets out those valid planning applications within a 200m buffer of the Proposed Development which are non-renewable in nature.

Table 2-3: Other Applications within 200m of the Proposed Development made within the last 5 years.

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
18/5686	Construction of a battery storage compound including 2 no. battery storage buildings with associated plant and equipment, an ancillary 110kV electricity substation with 2 no. control buildings, associated electrical plant & equipment and fencing, underground electricity cabling, surface water drainage, site entrance and access track, security fencing and all ancillary site works.	Granted by CCC, 15/02/2019
20/5281	Proposed modifications to the previously permitted development (planning ref: 18/06438 granted on 7th March 2019).The proposed modifications will comprise the additional construction of one (1) harmonic filter, one (1) HV circuit breaker (including CT and VT), one (1) MV disconnecter and earth switch, two (2) cable sealing ends, three (3) additional lightning masts (approximately 25m high) and additional lamppost lightning. It further includes a retaining wall (approximately 2.5m high), asphalt (non-permeable) surfacing, additional permanent access road, additional fencing to match existing 2.6m high palisade, additional permanent access gate and all other ancillary site development works. The	Granted by CCC, 21/09/2020

Pl.Ref	Description	Decision
	development will remain an extension to the existing substation and this extension will have an overall site area (within the planning application boundary) of 0.73ha. Access will continue to be provided via a L5226 and the R582.	

2.4 Scoping and Consultations

2.4.1 Scoping

Scoping is the process of determining the content, depth and extent of topics to be covered in the environmental information to be submitted to a competent authority for projects that are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This process is conducted by contacting the relevant authorities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with interest in the specific aspects of the environment with the potential to be affected by the proposal. These organisations are invited to submit comments on the scope of the EIAR and the specific standards of information they require. Comprehensive and timely scoping helps ensure that the EIAR refers to all relevant aspects of the Proposed Development and its potential effects on the environment and provides initial feedback in the early stages of the project, when alterations are still easily incorporated into the design. In this way scoping not only informs the content and scope of the EIAR, but it also provides a feedback mechanism for the proposal design itself.

A scoping report, providing details of the application site and the Proposed Development, was prepared by MKO and circulated in December 2021, with subsequent follow ups made in March 2022 to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and in April 2022 to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and Eirgrid. MKO requested the comments of the relevant personnel/bodies in their respective capacities as consultees with regards to the scope and preparation of the EIAR.

2.4.2 Scoping Responses

Table 2-4 lists the responses received from the bodies to the scoping document circulated in December 2021. Copies of all scoping responses received are included in Appendix 2-1 of this EIAR. If further responses are received, the comments of the consultees will be considered in the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development in the event of a grant of planning permission. The recommendations of the consultees have informed the scope of the assessments undertaken and the contents of the EIAR.

Table 2-4 Scoping Responses

No.	Consultee	Summary Response
1	An Taisce	Response received 20th December 2021
2	Bat Conservation Ireland	No Response
3	BirdWatch Ireland	No Response
4	Commission for Regulation of Utilities	No Response
5	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Response received 14 th January 2022

No.	Consultee	Summary Response
6	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications	Response received 22 nd /26 th April 2022
7	Department of Transport	Response received 13 th January 2022
8	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	No response
9	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Response received 16th March 2022
10	Department of Defence	No Response
11	ESB Networks	Response received 20th December 2021
12	Eirgrid	No Response
13	Failte Ireland	Response received 5th January 2022
14	Geological Survey of Ireland	Response received 18th January 2022
15	Health Service Executive	Response received 6 th January 2022
16	Inland Fisheries Ireland	Response received 17 th January 2022
17	Irish Wildlife Trust	No Response
18	Irish Peatland Conservation Council	No Response
19	Cork County Council – Roads and Transportation Unit	Response received 21st December 2021
20	Cork County Council – Environment Department	No Response
21	Cork County Council – Heritage Officer	No Response
22	Kerry County Council – Operations Department (Roads)	Response received 20th December 2021
23	Kerry County Council – Environment Department	Response received 7th January 2022
24	Kerry County Council – Heritage Officer	No Response.
25	Irish Water	No Response
26	Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Response received 6th January 2022
27	Office of Public Works	No Response
28	The Heritage Council	Response received 20th December 2021

No.	Consultee	Summary Response
29	South-Western RBD Project Office	Response received 4th January 2022
30	LAWPRO	Response received 4th January 2022

Table 2-5 overleaf presents the key points from the scoping responses and identifies where such points have been addressed in this EIAR.

Table 2-5 Review of Scoping Responses

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
1	An Taisce	An Taisce returned no comment on the Proposed Development	N/A
2	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	<p>The response noted:</p> <p>If the Proposed Development will involve the felling or removal of any trees, the developer must obtain a Felling License from the Department before trees are felled or removed.</p> <p>The developer should take note of the contents of Felling and Reforestation Policy document which provide a consolidated source of information on the legal and regulatory framework relating to tree felling. As this development is within forest lands, particular attention should be paid to deforestation, turbulence felling and the requirement to afforest alternative lands.</p>	Chapter 12 - Landscape
3	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications	<p>Response on behalf of Geological Survey Ireland (a division of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications)</p> <p><i>“With reference to your email dated 11 April 2022, regarding the proposed Knocknamork Turbine Delivery Route and Grid Connection Route Scoping, please note that Geological Survey Ireland has no specific comment or observations to make on this matter since our last response 21/476.”</i></p> <p>Response from Rory Coleman on behalf of Environmental Protection Division (a division of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications)</p> <p><i>“In respect of waste in the within documentation, we would be obliged if the Local Authority would consult directly with their respective Regional Waste Management Planning Office regarding development of the final plans.”</i></p>	N/A
4	Department of Transport	<p>The Department of Transport considers it important where the developer proposes the placement of any cables (or additional cables) in one or more trenches within the extents of the (regional and local) public road network, it is necessary to consider the following:</p> <p>Their presence within the public road could significantly restrict the Road Authority in carrying out its function to construct and maintain the public road and will likely add to the costs of those works.</p>	Chapter 3 – Reasonable Alternatives Chapter 5 – Population and Human Health

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
		<p>Their installation within the lands associated with the public road may affect the stability of the road. In particular where the road is a “legacy road” (where there is no designed road structure and the subgrade may be poor or poorly drained) the design needs to take account of all the variable conditions and not be based on a sample of the general conditions.</p> <p>The possible effect on the remaining available road space (noting that there may be need to accommodate other utilities within the road cross-section in the future).</p> <p>The necessity to have the power in the cables switched off where the Road Authority considers this necessary in order to carry out its function to construct and maintain the public road.</p> <p>The Department consider it important that the examination of the proposal should include consideration of the following:</p> <p>Examination of options other than the routing of cables along the public road, Examination of options for connection to the national grid network at a point closer to the wind farm in order to reduce the adverse impact on public roads. Details of where within the road cross section cables are to be placed so as to minimise the effect on the Roads Authority in its role of construction and maintenance, Examination of details of any chambers proposed within the public road cross section so as to minimise the effect on the Roads Authority in its role of construction and maintenance and, Rationalisation of the number of cables involved (including existing electric or possible future cables) and their diversion into one trench, in order to minimise the impacts on the road network and the environment along the road boundary (hedgerows).</p> <p>The Department considers the following should be considered when applying conditions to any approval.</p> <p>A condition requiring the specific approval of the local authority to the detail of the final route of cables through the public road space. If during construction there is a need to deviate from the detailed design then the approval of the local authority would again be sought. This would assist in minimising the impact on the public road.</p> <p>A condition requiring the developer to comply with all appropriate standards and, inter alia the Guidelines for Managing Openings in Public Roads, 2017 in order to ensure orderly development.</p>	

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
		<p>A condition requiring that the location of the cables would be recorded as exactly as possible (maybe using BIM type technology) so as to facilitate the further use of road space for utilities and the maintenance/construction of the public road by the Roads authority. This record should be lodged with the local authority and with the ESB Networks for retention on their records.</p> <p>A condition requiring the developer to route cables away from bridge structures and specifically preventing the developer from attaching cables to road bridges. This would allow for the future maintenance of bridges without interruption of the electricity supply along the cables.</p> <p>A condition requiring the developer to notify the Roads Authority of the owner of the cables (Owner) and the controller (Power Controller) of the power transmitted along the cables. In addition, the condition should require Owner and Power Controller to notify the Roads Authority of any change in ownership of the cables or change of Power Controller transmitting power along the cables. In all instances the Owner and Power Controller should be required to maintain an agreed contacts list with the Roads Authority.</p>	
5	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	<p>Not in a position to make specific comment on this particular referral at this time. No inference should be drawn from this that the Department is satisfied or otherwise with the proposed activity.</p> <p>The Department may submit observations/recommendations at a later stage in the process.</p>	N/A
6	ESB Networks	ESB returned no comment on the Proposed Development	N/A
7	Failte Ireland	<p>Provided a copy of Fáilte Ireland standard <i>EIAR Guidelines for the Consideration of Tourism and Tourism Related Projects</i> which should be considered during preparation of the EIAR. The document highlights how tourism can be incorporated into different assessments throughout the EIAR.</p>	Chapter 5 – Population and Human Health
8	Geological Survey of Ireland	<p>GSI provided details on their datasets which should be utilised as part of the assessment.</p> <p><u>Geoheritage</u></p> <p>The response notes that County Geological Sites (CGS) are being recognised and adopted under the National Heritage Plan and are now included in County Development Plans to ensure the recognition and</p>	<p>Chapter 8 – Geology and Soils</p> <p>Chapter 9 – Hydrology and Hydrogeology</p>

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
		<p>appropriate protection of geological heritage within the planning system. The records show that there are no CGS located in the vicinity of the Proposed Development</p> <p><u>Groundwater</u> “The Groundwater Resources (Aquifers) data viewer indicates the proposed substation and grid connection to Knocknamork Renewable Energy Development is underlain by a ‘Locally Important Aquifer –Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones’. The Groundwater Vulnerability map indicates both ‘High’ and ‘Extreme’ groundwater vulnerability within the area covered.” Groundwater and Flood Risk Management need to be considered as part of the assessment.</p> <p><u>Geological Mapping</u> The response encourages the use of Geological Survey Ireland online datasets of bedrock and subsoils geological mapping.</p> <p><u>Geotechnical Database Resources</u> The response encourages “the use of this database as part of any baseline geological assessment of the Proposed Development as it can provide invaluable baseline data for the region or vicinity of Proposed Development areas.”</p> <p><u>Geohazards</u> Landslides are common in areas of peat, rock near surface and in fine to coarse range materials (such as glacial tills), areas which are found within the proposed substation and grid connection for Knocknamork Renewable Energy Development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSI recommend that the potential for landslides are considered and assessed. 	
9	Health Service Executive	The HSE provided several guidance documents and reports to consider during preparation of the EIAR.	Chapter 2 – Background Chapter 4 – Description Chapter 5 – Human Beings Chapter 8 – Geology and Soils

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
		<p>Generally, the Environmental Impact Assessment should examine all likely significant impacts and provide the following information for each:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of receiving environment; • The nature and scale of the impact; • An assessment of the significance of the impact; • Proposed mitigation measures; • Residual impacts. <p>Directive 2014/52/EU has an enhanced requirement to assess likely significant impacts on population and human health. It is recommended that the wider determinants of health and wellbeing are considered in a proportionate manner when considering the EIA.</p> <p>The Environmental Health Service (EHS) recommends that the following matters are included and assessed in the EIAR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public consultation • Proposals for the substation and grid in the decommissioning phase of the wind farm • Noise and vibration impacts during construction and operational phases • Air quality impacts during construction phase • Surface and groundwater quality impacts during the construction phase • Geological impacts • Ancillary facilities • Cumulative impacts <p>Later Consents Required Information on possible future monitoring requirements for the operation of the substation should be included in the EIAR.</p> <p>Complaints Procedure The EIAR should include proposals for dealing with complaints from members of the public should they arise.</p>	<p>Chapter 9 – Hydrology and Hydrogeology Chapter 10 – Air and Climate Chapter 11 – Noise Chapter 16 – Schedule of Mitigation Measures</p>

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
10	Inland Fisheries Ireland	<p>The site of the Proposed Development encompasses the upper Clydagh and Foherish Rivers and their tributaries, significant salmonid fisheries. In this context IFI would ask that the following requirements should be taken into consideration.</p> <p>There should be no drainage, crossing, bridging, culverting or other physical interference with the bed or bank of any watercourse without prior consultation with IFI.</p> <p>Suspended solids and or hydrocarbon contaminated site run-off waters must be controlled adequately so that no pollution of surface waters can occur. More specifically IFI feels the following issues should be addressed.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Identifying and zoning the project for environmental impact should a peat slip ii. Setting out contingency plan should a peat movement occur. iii. Setting out a plan for the control of silt in such a scenario, including measures to be put in place at the initial stages of construction. <p>In the event of any watercourse crossings being bridged or culverted the following general criteria should apply;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The free passage of fish must not be obstructed. 2. Span watercourse crossings are the preferred option 3. Design details on any proposed crossing should be forwarded to IFI for consideration and incorporated at planning stage 4. Instream works should be carried out only in the July-September period. 	<p>Chapter 6 – Biodiversity Chapter 9 – Hydrology and Hydrogeology</p>
11	Cork County Council – Roads and Transportation Unit	Cork County Council – Roads and Transportation Unit returned no comment on the Proposed Development.	N/A
12	Kerry County Council – Operations Department (Roads)	Kerry County Council Roads Department returned no comment on the Proposed Development.	N/A
13	Kerry County Council – Environment Department	The response noted that the lower water body, the Flesk (KERRY) _020 is described as at risk as per WFD Risk 3rd cycle.	Chapter 9 – Hydrology and Hydrogeology

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
		<p>The response expresses concern for the potential impact on surface water quality downstream of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>The response suggests that attention is placed on any potential downstream impacts particularly as the Clydagh River is a tributary of the River Flesk, which in turn constitutes the main water body flowing into Lough Leane.</p>	
14	Transport Infrastructure Ireland	<p>The developer/scheme promoter should have regard, inter alia, to the following:</p> <p>Access to the national road network should be developed in accordance with official policy and road safety considerations. Consultations should be had with the Local Authority/National Roads Design office, with regard to existing and future road design networks.</p> <p>TII concerned as to potential significant impacts the development could have on the national road network in proximity to the Proposed Development.</p> <p>The developer should assess visual impacts from existing national roads.</p> <p>The developer should have regard to any EIAR/EIS and all conditions and/or modifications imposed by An Bord Pleanála regarding road schemes in the area.</p> <p>Developer should also be aware of cumulative impacts.</p> <p>Developer should have regard to TII Publications.</p> <p>The EIAR should consider the Environmental Noise Regulations, 2006'. Developer may need to consider the incorporation of sound barriers if necessary.</p> <p>TTA to be carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines. In relation to National Roads, TII's 'Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines' (2014) should be referred to in relation to the Proposed Development. The scheme promoter is also advised to have regard to Section 2.2 of TII's TTA Guidelines, which addresses requirements for sub-threshold TTA. Any improvements required to facilitate development should be identified. it will be the responsibility of the developer to pay for any such improvements.</p> <p>Consult TII publications to see if a Road Safety Audit is needed.</p> <p>EIAR should identify methods and techniques proposed for any works traversing/ in close proximity to the national road network.</p> <p>TII recommends the developer clearly identify haul routes and fully assess the network to be traversed. where abnormal weight loads are proposed, separate structure approvals/permits and other licences may be required.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to routing options, use of existing crossings, depth of cable laying, etc.</p>	<p>Chapter 3 – Reasonable Alternatives</p> <p>Chapter 13 – Material Assets</p>

No.	Consultee	Key Scoping Response Points	Addressed in EIAR
15	The Heritage Council	The Heritage Council returned no comment on the Proposed Development.	N/A
16	South-Western RBD Project Office	Response received stating: <i>“We have received a copy of the above referenced EIA Scoping Document addressed to the South-Western RBD Project Office in the past few weeks. Please note that the RBD project office is no longer at this address. I suggest any correspondence is addressed to the relevant local authorities.”</i>	N/A
17	SW LAWPRO	Response received stating: <i>“LAWPRO doesn’t have any role in the planning arena for Local Authorities or An Bord Pleanála. We’re not statutory consultees and wouldn’t normally get involved in EIA scoping or in any part of the planning process. You may have already forwarded the documents to the relevant local authority staff but if not, I can send you on details of the appropriate contact people in the environment sections of Kerry and Cork County Council if you need that information”</i>	N/A

2.5 Other Consultations

2.5.1 Pre-Planning Meetings

2.5.1.1 An Bord Pleanála

The prospective applicant engaged with An Board Pleanála under the provisions Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), as to whether the 110kv infrastructure elements of the Proposed Development would meet the thresholds of the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

MKO were of the opinion that the construction and operation of the proposed 110 kV substation and national grid connection and all associated electrical connections fall within Section 182A(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), based upon the definition of electricity transmission as set out in Subsection 9 of Section 182A:

“In this section ‘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.”*

Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 defines “transmission” in relation to electricity as follows:

*“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 Board 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 Board”*

Distribution is defined as:

“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 switch gear and which is used for conveying electricity to final customers.”

Electric plant is defined as:

“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*

MKO requested on behalf of the applicant to enter into pre-application consultation with the Board to formally determine whether the proposed 110kV substation, national grid connection and all ancillary works as set out above fall within the scope of Section 182A of the Act.

A first SID meeting was held with the Board on the 10th March 2022. Those in attendance were:

- Ciara Kellett, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair).
- Mairead Kenny, Senior Planning Inspector.
- Alaine Clarke, Planning Inspector.
- Kieran Somers, Executive Officer.
- William O' Connor, Turnkey Developments.
- Jimmy Green, MKO Ireland.
- Eoin O' Sullivan, MKO Ireland.
- Will Arnold, MKO Ireland.

The discussion included the following items:

- The Proposed Development relates to the functional areas of Cork County Council and Kerry County Council.
- The prospective applicant stated its opinion that the Proposed Development would comprise strategic infrastructure development.
- The Board's representatives expressed the opinion that the Proposed Development would constitute strategic infrastructure development but stated that the decision is ultimately for the Board.
- Clarity of planning history should be provided to the relevant Authorities.
- The Board enquired if there are any synergies with regard to the proposed Cummeennabuddoge wind farm (ABP-311198-21) although noting that this is still at pre-application stage. The prospective applicant replied that the proposed substation would be designed to standard Eirgrid specifications which caters for future expansion and that it could be so utilised for the proposed Cummeennabuddoge if permission were granted for this.
- Matters of degraded peat/Annex I Habitat.
- Appropriate Assessment/Natura Impact Statement.
- Engagement with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).
- Peat stability assessment.
- Part of the Proposed Development is located in a Gaeltacht area.
- Listed Views.
- Inclusion of borrow pit in the application.
- Post meeting note: Borrow pit can be included in relevant applications.

On the 13th April 2022, MKO on behalf of the prospective applicant sought to close the consultation process with An Bord Pleanála. At the time of the close out, the following design update was provided to the Board:

- The Proposed Development previously illustrated two potential 110kV underground cabling route options into the existing 220kV Ballyvouskill substation. This has now been refined to the northern route only.
- The planning application to Cork County Council will also include for the borrow pit consented under the Permitted Development (Pl. Ref: 19/4972) to be excavated further to ensure sufficient rock exists for construction of the access road required for the Proposed Development. Following pre-application consultation with Cork County Council, the planning application to Cork County Council will also illustrate the permitted 38kV substation (Pl. Ref: 19/4972), noting it will now not be required and as such will not be constructed.

On the 15th June 2022 An Bord Pleanála served notice that following consultations, it is of the opinion that the Proposed Development falls within the scope of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended and would be strategic infrastructure within the meaning of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Any application for approval of the Proposed Development must therefore be made directly to An Bord Pleanála. The Board provided a list of prescribed bodies considered relevant for the purposes of the application, as follows:

- > Cork County Council;
- > Kerry County Council;
- > Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government;
- > Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources;
- > Transport Infrastructure Ireland;
- > Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy;
- > Irish Water;
- > The Heritage Council;
- > An Taisce;
- > An Chomhairle Ealaíon;
- > Fáilte Ireland;
- > Inland Fisheries Ireland.

2.5.1.2 Cork County Council

A pre-planning meeting took place on the 24th of March 2022 via MS Teams with Gregg Simpson Senior Executive Planner and Carol Stack Area Planner, MKO Planning (Jimmy Green and Meabhann Crowe) were in attendance with the prospective applicant Knocknamork Ltd (William O'Connor). The team gave a PowerPoint presentation as an introduction to the site and development proposals, this included:

- > Application processes;
- > Site Selection;
- > Site Location;
- > Planning History;
- > Planning Policy Context – County Cork;
- > Proposed Development.

Matters discussed included:

- > Gaeltacht area – may need to run notices in both Irish and English;
- > Track may come down slightly to Cork administrative area;
- > Coordination between Kerry and Cork County Council;
- > 3 no. planning applications to be submitted;
- > Borrow pit will be included in application to Cork;
- > Compliance with condition of 2019 Permitted Development;
- > Redline boundaries;
- > Sub-threshold EIA and AA;
- > Single EIAR and NIS to cover entire development, across all three planning applications;
- > The Planner noted that the sub-station permitted under Planning Ref No. 194972 would no longer be required as a result of the Proposed Development. This should be noted in any subsequent planning application.

2.5.1.3 Kerry County Council

A pre-planning meeting took place on the 8th of March 2022 via MS Teams with Michael Lynch Senior Executive Engineer and Fiona O'Sullivan Planner, MKO Planning (Jimmy Green and Meabhann

Crowe) were in attendance with the prospective applicant Knocknamork Ltd (William O'Connor). The team gave a PowerPoint presentation as an introduction to the site and development proposals, this included:

- > Application processes
- > Site Selection
- > Site Location
- > Planning History
- > Planning Policy Context – County Kerry
- > Proposed Development

Matters discussed included:

- > Rationale for the change in substation requirements and An Bord Pleanála interactions .
- > 3 no. planning applications to be submitted.
- > Coordination between Kerry and Cork County Council.
- > Redline boundaries.
- > Cummeennabudoge proposed development of 19-turbine wind farm nearby.
- > Single EIAR and NIS to cover entire development, across all three planning applications.
- > Roads and access.

2.5.2 Community Consultation

The applicant has undertaken significant community consultation and stakeholder engagement.

1st Round of Public Consultation

The first round of correspondence was issued to the local community and uploaded to the project website on the 08th of December 2021, informing the community of the next stages of the project. The Knocknamork Renewable Energy Development was permitted in January 2020. The next stage for the project was to secure a connection to the national grid under a process known as ECP2.1, this was secured in September of this year.

Residents were updated on the next steps of the planning process was to consult with An Bord Pleanála to determine if they considered the Proposed Development to be Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID).

Additional information was provided in the form of draft layout map of the permitted renewable energy development, the proposed turbine delivery route and the new grid connection route, prepared by the project consultants MKO. Finally, the community were advised that a new CLO was taking over the project and his email and number was provided.

2nd Round of Public Consultation

A second round of correspondence was delivered to the local community and uploaded to the project website on the 17th of June 2022. Additional information was provided in the form of final layout map prepared by the project consultants MKO. Residents were updated on the query that was lodged to An Bord Pleanála to determine if they consider the Proposed Development to be Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID).

A public notice was placed in both the Southern Star and Kerry's newspaper on the 17th of June, to inform the wider community about the proposal and invite the interested parties to view the

information provided on the website www.knocknamorkinfo.com and to contact the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) with any feedback or queries in relation to the Proposed Development.

The notice also provided details of a public information evening that would be held in The Mills Inn, Ballyvourney Co. Cork on Tuesday 21st June from 16:00 to 20:00 to facilitate people that were not familiar with accessing information online.

Public Exhibition

A public information event was held in The Mills Inn, Ballyvourney Co. Cork on Tuesday 21st June from 16:00 to 20:00. The event was advertised in two local papers, The Southern Star in Co. Cork, and The Kerry's Eye in Co. Kerry.

Due to concerns regarding the spread of Covid 19 at the time, attendance could only be facilitated by appointment. Those wishing to attend were asked to make an appointment by contacting the CLO via the mobile number and/or email address advertised. No contact was received regarding appointments; however, the project representatives were in attendance on the night to cater for walk-in attendance. One interested party attended the event after hearing about it on local radio. As stated on the public notice, all the information provided at the public information session was made available on the project website, www.knocknamorkinfo.com.

At the session, there were a series of information leaflets and mapping on display that contained details on the following:

- > Proposed Development Site
- > Site Constraints and Development Design
- > The Proposed Development
- > The Planning Processes
- > Environmental Impact Assessment Report
- > Turbine Delivery Route
- > Proposed Grid Route
- > Need for the Project

2.6

Cumulative Impact Assessment

The EIA Directive and associated guidance documents state that as well as considering any direct, indirect, secondary, transboundary, short-, medium-, and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects of the project (all of which are considered in the various chapters of this EIAR), the description of likely significant effects should include an assessment of cumulative impacts that may arise. This description should take into account the environmental protection objectives established at Union or Member State level which are relevant to the project. The factors to be considered in relation to cumulative effects include population and human health, biodiversity, land, soil, water, air, climate, material assets, landscape, and cultural heritage as well as the interactions between these factors.

To gather a comprehensive view of cumulative impacts on these environmental considerations and to inform the EIAR process being undertaken by the consenting authority, each relevant chapter within this EIAR includes a cumulative impact assessment where appropriate.

The potential for cumulative impacts arising from other projects has therefore been fully considered within this EIAR.

2.6.1 Methodology for the Cumulative Assessment of Projects

To gather a comprehensive view of cumulative impacts on these above environmental considerations and to inform the EIA process being undertaken by the consenting authority, each relevant chapter within the EIAR addresses the potential for cumulative effects where appropriate.

The potential cumulative impact of the Proposed Development and other relevant developments has been carried out with the purpose of identifying what influence the Proposed Development will have on the surrounding environment when considered cumulatively and in combination with relevant approved, existing and planned projects in the vicinity of the proposed site.

The cumulative impact assessment of projects has three principle aims:

- To establish the range and nature of existing and/or approved projects within the cumulative impact study area of the Proposed Development.
- To summarise the relevant projects which have a potential to create cumulative impacts.
- To identify the projects that hold the potential for cumulative interaction within the context of the Proposed Development and discard projects that will neither directly or indirectly contribute to cumulative impacts.

Assessment material for the cumulative impact assessments carried out within this EIAR was compiled in relation to the relevant developments within the various zones of sensitivity of and to the Proposed Development from which there may be potential for cumulative impacts to arise. The material was gathered through a search of relevant online planning registers, reviews of relevant EIS/EIAR documents, planning application details and planning drawings, and served to identify past and future projects, their activities and their environmental impacts.

2.6.2 Projects Considered in Cumulative Assessment

The projects considered in relation to the potential for cumulative impacts arising from construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development and for which all relevant data was reviewed include those listed below.

2.6.2.1 Other Wind Turbines/Land-Uses

The planning history of other relevant wind farm developments in the general vicinity of the Proposed Development are listed in Table 2-1. Wind turbines are not proposed as part of the Proposed Development which constitutes supporting infrastructure for the previously Permitted Knocknamork Renewable Energy Development (Granted planning permission by Cork County Council on 2nd January 2020 (Pl. Ref. No. 19/4972) and as such relevant cumulative wind energy projects are considered to be those within 1km of the Proposed Development.

Relevant cumulative wind energy projects within the zone of influence are considered to be those within 1km of the Proposed Development. This distance has been derived on a highly precautionary basis following an assessment of the nature and scale of the works and considering the lack of a pathway for significant cumulative effects to occur as a result of the proposed works at distances greater than 1km. It reflects the fact that the Proposed Development forms part of a larger wind development project and assesses the other similar developments in the vicinity. Table 2-3 below sets out those valid planning applications within a 200m buffer of the Proposed Development made within the last 5 years which are not renewable energy projects. This 200 metre buffer was derived based on the nature and scale of both the Proposed Development and the surrounding planning applications, it was considered

that there is no potential for significant cumulative effects to occur at a distance of over 200m and this was an appropriate and conservative zone of influence to consider.

The Proposed Development was also considered in combination with other land uses in the surrounding area, which include commercial forestry, pastoral agriculture and turbarry.

Overall, the Proposed Development has been designed to mitigate impacts on the environment and particularly water, and a suite of mitigation measures is set out within the EIAR. The mitigation measures set out in this EIAR have been developed to ensure that significant cumulative affects do not arise during the continued operational or decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development. Additional detail in relation to the potential significant cumulative effects arising and, where appropriate, the specific suite of relevant mitigation measures proposed are set out within each of the relevant chapters of this EIAR.