

Do (To): Mr. A. Murray, A/Director of Services

Ó: (From) Mr. Gerry Bruton, Meetings Administrator

Ábhar (Subject): Extract of Draft Minutes from Council Meeting held in Áras an Chontae on 15 April 2024

Date: 16 April 2024

Tag (Ref):

Meetings administrator's record

The following is an extract of the minutes of the meeting of Offaly County Council held on 15 April 2024:

Mr. A. Murray advised the members that as per the Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) - Section 37E(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) - Proposed Combined Cycle Gas Turbine and Open Cycle Gas Turbine Thermal Power Plant – Bord na Móna Powergen Ltd application, it is a requirement to present and seek views of the members to submit to An Bord Pleanála, as recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

He informed the members that the application is for 10-year planning permission for Combined Cycle Gas Turbine and Open Cycle Gas Turbine Thermal Power Plant, Electricity Grid Connection including 2 no. substations, and associated buildings, plant, site works, service and ancillary development.

Cllr. L. Quinn outlined the submission he has made in regard to the application and requested that it is recorded as part of this process. He noted that this is a substantial application, one of the biggest infrastructure projects ever in the county and acknowledged that gas supply is in line with the national drive for clean fuel. He outlined the 10 key points in his submission, some of which have been dealt with in the Chief Executives report.

Key Points of Cllr. L. Quinn Submission:

1. The cabling connecting this development to the substation be located **entirely underground with no overhead wires/pylons permitted.**
2. A **pavement/structural survey of the R400 and L1010** be carried out and works completed in advance of any construction taking place.
3. The R400 at Derrygreenagh Hill be widened and upgraded.

4. The L1010 (Rhode Village – Taylors Cross) be widened where feasible and **overlaid with a new road surface in advance of construction works.**
5. A condition be placed on the applicant to construct a **Footpath from Priory Lawns to the Football Field** before construction commences.
6. The proposed **Community Benefit Fund be index linked** to output as is currently best practice for Wind/Solar developments under the current RESS Guidelines. (Currently €2/MWh)
7. Houses **located within 1km of the development boundary**, and not just the Power Plant site be included in a “Near Neighbour” Scheme.
8. The **Greenway** joining the Grand Canal to Croghan Hill and linking onto Westmeath be constructed along the route of the old Light Rail Network.
9. That the historic lake, “**Lough na Shade**” be reinstated
10. That An Bord Pleanála allow an **Oral Hearing** as part of this development to allow local residents an opportunity to discuss their concerns.

Cllr. L. Quinn informed the members that the proposed cable way will have a major visual impact on the surrounding countryside. This imposition can be overcome by undergrounding the entire cable way from Derrygreenagh to Tubberdaly. The site is accessed via the R400 and this road is constructed on a peat foundation and is consistently in poor condition. The bridge over the Yellow River on the R400 failed in July 2023 and this regional road was closed for almost 5 months while a new bridge was installed. The closure of the R400 last Autumn caused significant damage to the local roads that were being used as diversion routes over this time. No upgrading works have been carried out on these roads to date.

He highlighted that there is no pedestrian access linking Rhode Village with the GAA Field at present. Each week, hundreds of people, especially children and teenagers attend training and matches in the GAA Field. Rhode has a deep-rooted association with the GAA and pedestrian access to club facilities located on the L1010 should be seen as a priority for the safety of people in the area. He highlighted that there are no houses located within 1km of the Power Station Building, but homes located next to cable routes and substations should qualify for a near neighbour payment as they are equally as affected.

He acknowledged that Bord Na Mona state that they intend to operate a Community Benefit Fund for 5 Years consisting of a contribution of €90,000 per year as a goodwill gesture, as it is not a requirement under the current RESS guidelines. He called on the fund to be larger, to run for the lifetime of the development and be index linked to output. Taken in context, County Offaly’s largest Windfarm “Yellow River” is located adjacent to this site and has a Community benefit fund of Circa €595,000 per annum. This Proposed Power Station will generate 6 times more power than Yellow River Windfarm yet contribute 85% less in Community Funding Per Annum.

Cllr. N. Cribbin voiced his support for the submission and thanked Cllr. L. Quinn for his work on analysing this huge application. He welcomed the investment and jobs that the project may provide, however he expressed disappointment on the low level of funding for North Offaly promised by Bord na Mona.

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick the members resolved to write to the newly appointed Minister Burke seeking an urgent meeting as a follow up to the meeting with Minister Simon Coveney in January 2024 regarding the future use of Bord na Mona lands, community benefits and dividends from renewable project etc.

Cllr. R. McDermott queried the amount of €30k, recommended for a Special Contribution in respect of road strengthening and upgrading of the R400 and how much would the cash deposit or bond be for reinstatement of sections of the public road network that may be damaged as a result of the transportation of materials to the site.

In response Mr. E. Kelly advised that calculation of the bond was discussed at length with the Roads section and the Municipal District and it was decided that it would be best to specify the amount closer to construction time. He confirmed that following a lot of consultation, the three amounts of €30k contribution was agreed on, for immediate works for general maintenance. This condition is to repair roads due to increased traffic volumes as a result of the proposed development. Other conditions are suggested to the Board to require the developer to immediately repair the road network if a rapid road failure takes place as a result of construction road traffic. He thanked Mr. M. Duffy, E.P. for compiling the report on the application which runs to 9 volumes.

Mr. A. Murray acknowledged there is a lot of correlation with Cllr. L. Quinns submission and the Chief Executives report and the submission can be attached as an addendum. He noted that the site boundary (including the cable route) coincides with approx. 6km of proposed greenway per the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*. He stated that the visual quality of the structure is very important because it is an open landscape and also as it may be the first element of a larger Green Energy Park and other investments. He advised that the timeline for planning would be 6 months minimum and as the creation of dispatchable power is a national priority, if the application is approved commencement of works could be relatively soon.

On proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn and seconded by Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executives Report for the Strategic Infrastructure Division application for a proposed Combined Cycle Gas Turbine and Open Cycle Gas Turbine Thermal Power Plant with ancillary developments, reference no PA19.319023, which will be submitted to An Bord Pleanala in compliance with section 37(E)(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

On proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn and seconded by Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick the members resolved to attach recommendations in the form of Cllr. Liam Quinn's submission (dated 2nd April 2024) as an addendum to the C.E.'s report as per Section 37(E) (6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Gerry Bruton
Meetings Administrator