

Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report

East Meath - North Dublin Grid Upgrade

EirGrid

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Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Structure of this Report	1
2.	Description of the Proposed Development	1
2.1	Location of the Proposed Development	1
2.2	The Proposed Development	2
3.	Requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment.....	3
3.1	EIA Legislation	3
3.2	EIA Screening Methodology.....	3
3.3	EIA Screening – Requirement for Mandatory EIA	4
3.3.1	The Planning and Development Regulations, Schedule 5, Part 1	4
3.3.2	The Planning and Development Regulations, Schedule 5, Part 2	4
4.	Conclusion	5
5.	References	5

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

EirGrid plc (EirGrid), with the consent and approval of Electricity Supply Board, is proposing to apply to An Bord Pleanála under Section 182A of Number 30 of 2000 - Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the Planning and Development Act (as amended)) for the construction and installation of approximately 37.5 kilometres (km) of new 400 kilovolt (kV) underground cable circuit between the existing Woodland Substation in the townland of Woodland in County Meath, and the existing Belcamp Substation in the townlands of Clonshagh and Belcamp in Fingal, County Dublin. The proposed development will also involve works in the substations to facilitate the connection of the underground cable circuit to the electrical grid. This development is known as the 'East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade' (hereafter referred to as the Proposed Development).

The Proposed Development is required to reinforce the network between East Meath and North Dublin. Reinforcement of this part of the network is needed to continue to ensure the security of the network feeding the east of Meath and the north of Dublin, between Woodland, Clonee, Corduff, Finglas and Belcamp Substations. The Proposed Development will help meet the growing demand for electricity in the east of the country due to the increased economic activity and population growth in recent years in Kildare, Meath, and Dublin. It will also enable further development of renewable energy generation in line with Government policy.

The purpose of this Report is to identify the legal requirement, or otherwise, for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Proposed Development, in accordance with establishing the need for EIA under Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 (hereafter referred to as the EIA Directive). Screening for EIA is the term used to describe the process for determining whether a proposed development requires EIA by reference to mandatory classes of development and threshold requirements, or by reference to the type and scale of the proposed development and the significance or the environmental sensitivity of the receiving baseline environment.

1.2 Structure of this Report

The structure of this Report is set out, as follows:

- Section 2 (Description of the Proposed Development): provides an outline of the specific details of the Proposed Development;
- Section 3 (Requirement for an EIA): discusses EIA legislation, the EIA Screening process, and the reasons why the Proposed Development meets the threshold for mandatory EIA;
- Section 4 (Conclusion); and
- Section 5 (References).

2. Description of the Proposed Development

2.1 Location of the Proposed Development

The Proposed Development will involve the installation of approximately 37.5km of 400kV underground cable circuit to be located between the existing Woodland Substation in the townland of Woodland in County Meath, and the existing Belcamp Substation in the townlands of Clonshagh and Belcamp in Fingal, County Dublin.

2.2 The Proposed Development

The Proposed Development consists of the following principal elements:

- A. Installation of an underground cable circuit, approximately 37.5km in length, connecting Woodland Substation (400kV) in the townland of Woodland in County Meath, and Belcamp Substation (220kV) in the townlands of Clonshagh and Belcamp in Fingal. The development of the underground cable circuit will include the following:
- Construction of a trench of approximately 1.5m in width and approximately 1.3m in depth in the public road (approximately 26km) and approximately 1.8m in depth in private lands (approximately 11.5km) in which the underground cable circuit is laid in flat formation, with associated above ground route marker posts. Route marker posts will be located at field boundaries where the proposed underground cable circuit is laid in private land, at regular intervals in road verges when the proposed underground cable circuit is in-road, in road verges where the proposed underground cable circuit crosses any roads, and at Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) crossing locations;
 - Construction of 49 Joint Bays (on average every 750m), primarily in the public roads, each approximately 10m in length, 2.5m in width and 2.5m in depth, with adjacent communication chambers and link boxes, along the full alignment of the underground cable circuit. Where the Joint Bays are located off-road, permanent hardstanding areas will be created around the Joint Bays;
 - The laying of communication links and fibre optic cables between both substations, running in the same trench as the underground cable circuit;
 - The provision of seven Temporary Construction Compounds located along the route and adjacent to substations – sizes for each of the seven Temporary Construction Compounds ranging from approximately 0.8ha to 1.6ha;
 - The provision of a Temporary HDD Compound at both the reception and launch locations for three HDD motorway crossings, (i.e., six temporary HDD Compounds in total), and associated laydown area for each HDD crossing (i.e., three laydown areas in total) - sizes for each of the six HDD Compounds (plus laydown area where applicable) ranging from approximately 0.15ha to 0.45ha;
 - The provision of temporary Passing Bays during construction at certain Joint Bay locations, each approximately 95m in length and 5.5m in width;
 - The laying of unbound temporary access tracks, 5m wide in private lands (approximately 12km in total length);
 - The laying of 12 unbound, permanent access tracks, 4m wide in private land (approximately 4km in total length);
 - All associated water, rail, road, and utility underground crossings using either trenchless drilling or open cut techniques as appropriate for the particular crossing; and
 - All associated and ancillary above and below-ground site development works, including works comprising or relating to permanent and temporary construction and reinstatement, roadworks, utility diversions and site and vegetation clearance.
- B. Upgrades to the existing 400kV Woodland Substation in the townland of Woodland in County Meath. This will include:
- Installation of a 400kV feeder bay and associated electrical shunt reactor (approximately 8m in height);
 - Installation of insulators, instrument transformers, overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors (up to 12.6m in height) in order to connect the bay to the busbar;
 - Installation of two gantries, 25m in height, with one 3m tall lightning rod on top of each gantry; and

- All ancillary site development works including site preparation works, underground cabling, drainage and earthgrid, as required to facilitate the Proposed Development.
- C. Upgrades to the existing 220kV Belcamp Substation in the townlands of Clonshagh and Belcamp in Fingal. This will include:
 - Construction of a new steel framed and clad building (73m long, 17.8m wide by 16m high) to house a new 400kV Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) Hall, plus eight lightning rods on the roof of the GIS Hall (each 3m in height);
 - Installation of 400kV switchgear to facilitate the connection of the new underground cable circuit to the existing substation;
 - Installation of associated electrical shunt reactor (approximately 8m in height) with insulators, instrument transformers, overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors (up to 12.8m in height) in order to connect the reactor to the cable circuit;
 - Installation of two lightning masts (each 15m in height);
 - Installation of a new 400/220kV transformer adjacent to the new GIS Hall and connections to the existing 220kV substation via cable circuit;
 - Internal access road; and
 - All ancillary site development works including site preparation works, site clearance and levelling, drainage, access tracks, and use of existing access points off Stockhole Lane and the R139.

3. Requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment

3.1 EIA Legislation

The EIA Directive is based on the precautionary principle and on the principles that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay. Effects on the environment should be taken into account at the earliest possible stage in all of the technical planning and decision-making processes.

The Proposed Development has been reviewed against the classes of development and thresholds set out in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive, as transposed into Irish law by Schedule 5 of S.I. No. 600/2001 - Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the Planning and Development Regulations).

3.2 EIA Screening Methodology

EIA Screening is the first stage of the EIA process and determines whether the environmental impact of a proposed development or project will be such that an EIA is required.

EIA Screening for the Proposed Development was undertaken with consideration of the following legislation and guidance:

- Planning and Development Act (as amended);
- The Planning and Development Regulations;
- Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects - Guidance on Screening (European Commission 2017); and
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA 2022).

3.3 EIA Screening – Requirement for Mandatory EIA

The EIA Directive specifies the classes of project for which an EIA is required, and the information which must be furnished within an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). In accordance with Article 4(1) of the EIA Directive, all projects listed in Annex I to the EIA Directive are considered as having likely significant effects on the environment and shall be subject to environmental assessment. For projects listed in Annex II to the EIA Directive, the national authorities may determine whether an EIA is needed, either on the basis of thresholds / criteria or on a case-by-case examination.

In order to determine whether an EIA is required for the Proposed Development, it is necessary to determine whether it is a project listed in Part 1 or Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations.

An application under Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act (as amended) which belongs to a class of development identified for the purposes of Section 176 of the Planning and Development Act (as amended), and equals or exceeds the applicable threshold for the class, must be accompanied by an EIAR.

For the purposes of Section 176 of the Planning and Development Act (as amended), the relevant classes of development are set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations. Under Section 172(1)(a)(ii)(i) of the Planning and Development Act (as amended), an EIA must be carried out by An Bord Pleanála in respect of an application for consent for a proposed development, where the proposed development would be of a class specified in Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, and such development would equal or exceed, as the case may be, any relevant quantity, area or other limit specified in that Part. Classes within Schedule 5, Parts 1 and 2, that are most relevant to the Proposed Development were considered and a determination made against each one.

3.3.1 The Planning and Development Regulations, Schedule 5, Part 1

No classes of development, as outlined in Schedule 5, Part 1 of the Planning and Development Regulations, were considered applicable or fitting of the Proposed Development.

3.3.2 The Planning and Development Regulations, Schedule 5, Part 2

The relevant class of development in Schedule 5, Part 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations is presented below:

"1(a) Projects for the restructuring of rural land holdings, undertaken as part of a wider proposed development, and not as an agricultural activity that must comply with the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Agriculture) Regulations 2011, where the length of field boundary to be removed is above 4 kilometres, or where re-contouring is above 5 hectares, or where the area of lands to be restructured by removal of field boundaries is above 50 hectares".

The Proposed Development is for the purposes of grid infrastructure, and to comply with EirGrid's statutory mandate to ensure a secure and reliable electricity transmission network.

The Proposed Development includes the provision of temporary Passing Bays to facilitate on-road Joint Bay construction, and at locations, off-road alignment of the proposed underground cable circuit and associated infrastructure. These will involve temporary and permanent removal of 4km or more of existing field boundary.

Having regard to the absence of guidelines on how this legislation should be interpreted, and given the fact that the Proposed Development, along its cumulative length (although of very localised extent at any particular location), will result in an exceedance of the 4km length of field boundary to be removed. From a legally cautious perspective, an EIAR has been prepared and EIA is required.

4. Conclusion

The Proposed Development is of a class of development within Schedule 5, Part 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations (i.e. paragraph 1(a), Part 2, Schedule 5), as outlined in Section 3.3.2, and will exceed the relevant specified amount in that class. The Proposed Development therefore triggers mandatory EIA and an EIAR accompanies this planning application.

5. References

European Commission (2017). Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects - Guidance on Screening

EPA (2022). Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports

Directives and Legislation

Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment

Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment

Number 30 of 2000 - Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)

S.I. No. 600/2001 - Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended)

S.I. No. 456/2011 - European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Agriculture) Regulations 2011

S.I. No. 296/2018 – European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018