

East Meath - North Dublin Grid Upgrade Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR): Volume 3

Appendix A1.2 – Likely Evolution of the Baseline

EirGrid

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Appendix A1.2 – Likely Evolution of the Baseline | 1 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 2 |
| 2. References | 6 |

Appendix A1.2 – Likely Evolution of the Baseline

1. Introduction

Annex IV to Directive 2014/52/EU of the 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 (hereafter referred to as the EIA Directive) specifies the information to be contained in an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), in relation to the East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade (hereafter referred to as the Proposed Development). One of the requirements is to include:

"A description of the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment (baseline scenario) and an outline of the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the project as far as natural changes from the baseline scenario can be assessed with reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge."

Table 1.1: Summary of the Likely Evolution of the Baseline in the Absence of the Proposed Development includes a summary of the likely evolution of the baseline environment (in the absence of the Proposed Development) that can be determined with 'reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge'.

Table 1.1: Summary of the Likely Evolution of the Baseline in the Absence of the Proposed Development

| EIAR Chapter | Likely Evolution of the Baseline in the Absence of the Proposed Development |
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| Chapter 5 (Population) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, rural and urban areas will continue to evolve. The existing rural land and amenity uses surrounding the Proposed Development are likely to remain relatively unchanged. However, existing zoned land will be developed, and development will be consolidated within and around existing urban settlements in line with national planning policies for compact growth. This will result in a further concentration of development around transport nodes (e.g., Dunboyne). The economy outlook is positive in the short to medium-term because of a resilient labour market, decelerating inflation, and rising real incomes. Necessary adjustments to the economy for long-term sustainable growth will be influenced / facilitated by public policy.</p> <p>The latest Census was undertaken in 2022 and the summary results published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show that over 2 million people, or just over 40% of the population of Ireland, now live in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) which includes the counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare, and Wicklow (CSO 2023). By 2031, the population of the GDA is projected to reach 2.2 million which represents continued growth in the GDA into the future.</p> |
| Chapter 6 (Human Health) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, the health status of the population would be expected to change with time, in accordance with current trends across Ireland, as set out in Health In Ireland: Key Trends (Department of Health 2022) including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in the proportion of the population aged over 65; • Reductions in mortality rates from respiratory diseases and circulatory system diseases; and • Reductions in suicide rates. |
| Chapter 7 (Air Quality) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, there are a number of relevant factors that could influence the evolution of the air quality baseline, such as other committed developments, climate change, general trends in air quality and fleet composition. However, it is not possible to quantify the potential impact of these future changes, but it is likely that the future baseline will remain largely unchanged. Construction activities will continue in existing urban areas and at Dublin Airport which could lead to short-term and long-term concentrations of fine particulate matter. Current trends in road traffic emissions will continue in the short-term, however, increased numbers of electric vehicles will reduce associated air pollutants in the longer-term.</p> |
| Chapter 8 (Climate) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, it is anticipated that climate conditions will remain broadly the same. Future climate effects will be influenced by structural and behavioural change to enable the transition to a climate neutral, climate-resilient country consistent with the overarching government’s Climate Action Plans, as filtered down to regional plans and policies.</p> |
| Chapter 9 (Noise and Vibration) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, noise levels are expected to increase through natural traffic growth and an increase in airport noise due to the expected expansion of Dublin Airport. This would result in an increase in noise levels over and above the current baseline scenario.</p> |
| Chapter 10 (Biodiversity) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, the rural and urban areas will continue to evolve. The existing rural land uses surrounding are likely to remain relatively unchanged. However, existing zoned land will be developed. Current biodiversity trends are likely to continue for pasture and arable agricultural lands.</p> <p>Any effects on biodiversity are likely to be moderated by the environmental and biodiversity policies of the existing and future County Development Plans, Biodiversity Plans, and the overarching pollution control objectives of River Basin Management Plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Sites for Nature Conservation: Designated sites within the zone of influence (Zol) of the Proposed Development would likely remain as described in the baseline outlined in Chapter 10 (Biodiversity) in Volume 2 of the EIAR into the medium-term future. The current pressures and threats affecting these sites would remain in the absence of the Proposed Development; • Habitats and Flora: Habitats within the Zol of the Proposed Development would likely remain as described in the baseline outlined in Chapter 10 (Biodiversity) in Volume 2 of the EIAR into the medium-term future. The current pressures and threats affecting these habitats would remain in the absence of the Proposed Development; and • Fauna: Fauna within the Zol of the Proposed Development would likely remain as described in the baseline outlined in Chapter 10 (Biodiversity) in Volume 2 of the EIAR into the medium-term future. The current pressures and threats affecting these species would remain in the absence of the Proposed Development. |

East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade
Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR): Volume 3

| EIAR Chapter | Likely Evolution of the Baseline in the Absence of the Proposed Development |
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| Chapter 11 (Soils, Geology and Hydrogeology) | In the absence of the Proposed Development, the current soils, geological and hydrogeology profiles within the study area are not expected to change. In the absence of the Proposed Development, other developments may still go ahead which could impact baseline conditions. Baseline conditions will continue to be impacted by the pressures on groundwater bodies in the area. |
| Chapter 12 (Hydrology) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, other developments may still go ahead which could impact baseline conditions. Baseline conditions will continue to be impacted by the pressures on each water body, as listed in Section 12.3 of Chapter 12 (Hydrology) in Volume 2 of the EIAR, such as agriculture, domestic wastewater, urban wastewater, hydromorphology and urban runoff pressures.</p> <p>The water bodies in the area surrounding the Proposed Development are expected to maintain their current water quality, pressures and ecological status designations. They may see improvement overtime due to inter alia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government planning polices such implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) features in the Development Plans; and • Improved wastewater management infrastructure along with future strategic infrastructure identified by Uisce Éireann. <p>However, while these are positive projects which should improve the overall water quality and ecological status of water bodies, it is premature to rely on their complete implementation.</p> <p>Future climate change is predicted to give rise to an increased risk of flooding through rising sea levels and an increase in river flows and the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall (discussed further in Appendix A12.1 (Flood Risk Assessment) in Volume 3 of the EIAR).</p> |
| Chapter 13 (Archaeology, Architectural Heritage and Cultural Heritage) | In the absence of the Proposed Development, other developments requiring road alteration or development in the off-road sections will take place. These other developments may impact below or above ground archaeological, architectural heritage, or cultural heritage assets. |
| Chapter 14 (Traffic and Transport) | In the absence of the Proposed Development, traffic volumes are expected to increase along existing roads due to natural traffic growth. Future traffic volumes have been forecast using growth rates from Table 7.4 of the National Transport Model Update - Travel Demand Forecasting Report (Transport Infrastructure Ireland 2019) and are discussed in Chapter 14 (Traffic and Transport) in Volume 2 of the EIAR. |
| Chapter 15 (Agronomy and Equine) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, agricultural practices by their nature change over time. In the last one hundred years there have been considerable changes in farming in Ireland, with average farm sizes increasing while the numbers of people involved directly with farming has decreased. This trend is likely to continue. In addition, the area farmed in the country had decreased in the last 100 years from 216,000 hectares (ha) in 1915 to 197,450 ha in 2020. This is due to development of the various towns and villages in the country, but also due to the development of infrastructure. In the absence of the Proposed Development, these trends are likely to continue.</p> <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, impacts are likely to arise from other developments that will be progressed within the study area over time. In the agricultural baseline environment within the study area there are pressures on agricultural land from developments for housing, industry and infrastructural projects (e.g. Greater Dublin Drainage Project).</p> |
| Chapter 16 (Waste) | In the absence of the Proposed Development, available capacity in waste management facilities will continue to be used by new developments and infrastructure, in line with planning commitments but guided by the existing and future National Waste Management Plans. Additional waste management facilities may also open in the future. |
| Chapter 17 (Material Assets) | <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, the current utilities and services identified will continue to exist and planned / permitted infrastructure will be built, subject to planning (such as the Greater Dublin Drainage Project and the MetroLink Cables Project). General improvements and changes will continue to occur, such as new connections to the various services driven by legislative and local policy measures, as well as new service lines / connections associated with new development.</p> <p>In the absence of the Proposed Development, EirGrid will implement the permitted developments at Woodland Substation under planning reference number 221550 which was submitted to Meath County Council, and application reference number PC001 submitted to An Bord Pleanála. EirGrid will also implement the permitted development at Belcamp Substation under planning reference number 23A/0040, submitted to Fingal County Council. In the event that planning is granted, EirGrid will</p> |

| EIAR Chapter | Likely Evolution of the Baseline in the Absence of the Proposed Development |
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| | also implement the Kildare - Meath Grid Upgrade Project (An Bord Pleanála planning application reference number 316372). EirGrid will continue to develop the electricity grid in line with its statutory function which will include future transmission infrastructure developments in County Meath and Fingal and the wider Dublin area. |
| Chapter 18 (Landscape and Visual) | It is noted that the area surrounding the Proposed Development is likely to remain predominantly agricultural in the vicinity of Woodland Substation but continue to experience increases in infrastructure projects (for example solar farms) and increases in pressure from encroaching urban development. In terms of strategic future development around Belcamp Substation, the East-West Distributor Road is a planned project to the north of the Proposed Development. The IDA lands on the southern side of that road are zoned for business park development, and residential development is zoned a short distance to the south-east. In addition, a planning application for a Wastewater Treatment Plant to the north of Belcamp Substation has been submitted for planning (An Bord Pleanála reference number 312131). For these reasons, the rural character of the site and its immediate surrounds are very likely to transition into that of a peri-urban landscape within the next five to 10 years, regardless of whether the Proposed Development should proceed. |

2. References

CSO (2023). Census 2022 data. [Online] Available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/data/> [Accessed November 2023]

Department of Health (2022). Health In Ireland: Key Trends. [Online]. Available from <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fdc2a-health-in-ireland-key-trends-2022/> [Accessed 14 February 2024].

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2019). National Transport Model Update - Travel Demand Forecasting Report (Volume 3)

Directives and Legislation

Directive 2014/52/EU of the 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