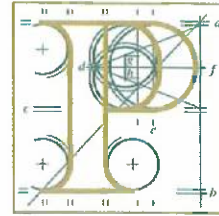


ADDENDUM 4

Record of ABP Meeting Minutes

Our Case Number: ABP-314271-22

Your Reference: Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited



**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Crystal Leiker
SLR Consulting Ireland
7 Dundrum Business Park
Dublin 14
D14 N2Y7

Date: 20th October 2022

Re: Proposed 52.8 MW Wind Farm including 8 no. turbines, Grid Connection and 110kv loop-in/loop-out electricity substation
Located approx. 1km southwest of Clonmellon and 1.6km northeast of Devlin, in Counties Westmeath and Meath

Dear Madam,

I have been asked by An Bord Pleanála to refer further to the above-mentioned pre-application consultation request.

Please find enclosed a copy of the written record of the first meeting of the 5th October, 2022.

If you have any queries in relation to the matter please contact the undersigned officer of the Board.

Please quote the above-mentioned An Bord Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Board.

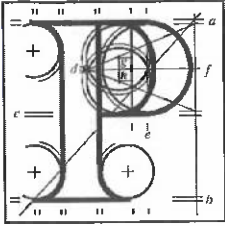
Yours faithfully,

Doina Chiforescu
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-873 7133

PC07

Tel	Tel	(01) 858 8100
Glaó Áitiúil	LoCall	1890 275 175
Facs	Fax	(01) 872 2684
Láithreán Gréasáin	Website	www.pleanala.ie
Ríomhphost	Email	bord@pleanala.ie

64 Sráid Maoilbhríde	64 Marlborough Street
Baile Átha Cliath 1	Dublin 1
D01 V902	D01 V902



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-314271-22 1st Meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-314271-22 Proposed 52.8 MW Wind Farm including 8 no. turbines, Grid Connection and 110kv loop-in/loop-out electricity substation, located approx. 1km southwest of Clonmellon and 1.6km northeast of Devlin, in Counties Westmeath and Meath		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Date	05/10/2022	Time	11:00am – 12:10pm
Location	Virtually by Microsoft Teams		

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Staff Members
Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)
Máire Daly, Planning Inspector
Doina Chiforescu, Executive Officer
Representing the Prospective Applicant
Sawyer Charles, Statkraft
Aislinn O'Brien, SRL Consulting
Crystal Leiker, SRL Consulting
Edward Goulding, SRL Consulting

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant requesting a pre-application consultation and advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board; it also invited the prospective applicant to outline the nature of the proposed development and to highlight any matters it wished to receive advice on from the Board. The Board mentioned general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process as follows:

- The Board will keep a record of this meeting and any other meetings, if held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process. The record of the meeting will not be amended by the Board once finalised, but the prospective applicant may submit comments on the record which will form part of the case file.
- A further meeting or meetings may be held in respect of the proposed development.
- Further information may be requested by the Board and public consultations may also be directed by the Board.
- The Board may hold consultations in respect of the proposed development with other bodies.
- The holding of consultations does not prejudice the Board in any way and cannot be relied upon in the formal planning process or any legal proceedings.

Presentation by the prospective applicant

The prospective applicant gave a brief introduction to the prospective applicant company, Statkraft Ireland. It was noted that Statkraft Ireland has the most advanced wind and solar development pipeline of any developer in Ireland.

The prospective applicant provided the Board's representatives with an overview of the proposed development, which will consist of an 8-turbine wind farm development with in 2 no. clusters, with a combined output of 52.8 MWs, so above the 50MW threshold. The proposed turbines will have a height of c. 170m and a rotor diameter of 155m, each turbine has a potential to generate 6.6MW of power. The preliminary design will consist in 8 wind turbines, 3 no access tracks, turbine delivery route and internal substation. Also, internal electricity grid route and 110kV underground grid connection; the grid connection and substation form part of this application. The prospective applicant noted that an Environmental Assessment is currently ongoing, and they anticipate further design iterations to reflect this process.

The proposed turbine delivery route is to arrive from Dublin port, approaching the site from Mullingar and N52. It was stated that a TDR Assessment has been carried out and swept paths for all the node points along the route was completed and that no significant constraints have been identified. Regarding the grid connection, it was noted the proposed substation is located within the development site. The grid connection will access the existing 110 kV Overhead Line at Clonmellon via an underground cable along the public road. This connection is proposed via a width of 4.6 metres, encompassing two trenches of 0.6 m and required separation distance.

The prospective applicant stated that the proposed development would create employment opportunities relating to the construction, operation and decommissioning, totalling approximately 185 construction jobs.

The prospective applicant proposes to submit a NIS and an EIAR with the application which will include for an assessment of the connection to the national grid. Stated that, a suite of biodiversity enhancement measures will also be developed and implemented to take account of sensitive ecological receptors.

The turbines are to be in two adjacent clusters located approximately 1km southeast of Clonmellon and 1.6km northeast of Devlin in County Westmeath, with the western

boundary of the site immediately bound by the Meath County administrative boundary. The proposed site is bound to the east by the N52, a national primary road. The site is comprised of both private plantation forestry and native woodland, with the rest of the site made up of agricultural lands, there is also a quarry present on these lands. The River Stonyford and its tributary the D' Arcy crossroad streams form part of the western boundary of the site. A protected structure is also present on the site.

The prospective applicant gave a brief description for the proposed site access. Access to the Northern cluster is proposed via the N52 and the local road L5542 which passes through the townland of Carnybrogan, approximately 2 km southwest of the town of Clonmellon. The preferred access to the Southern cluster is proposed through a new access via the N52 within the townlands of Cavestown and Rosmead. An alternative Option for Access to the Southern Cluster is proposed via the N52 and the local road L5542.

In relation to potential effects on the receiving environment, the prospective applicant advised that a study area of 1 km surrounding wind turbines has been used to identify potential sensitive residential receptors. There are 126 residential receptors within the 1km buffer which will be assessed within the EIAR. A Zone of Theoretical Visibility study with an area extending to 20km around the site, was also taken into consideration. It was highlighted that ZTVs do not take into consideration vegetation cover, changing weather conditions or the mitigating effect of distance; therefore, this illustrates the worst-case scenario of visibility. Around 35 viewpoints will be used for the LVIA points locations, and these will be selected at sensitive receptor locations. A total of 10 key views in close proximity to the site have been captured to date for use in the design refinement process. The prospective applicant presented some photomontages with examples of five of these viewpoints.

In relation to potential effects on cultural heritage, the prospective applicant listed the national monument record assets and the national inventory of architectural heritage. Two key constraints were noted, listed under the CDP's Record of Protected Structures (Rosmead Gate: 009- 034; Rosmead House: 009-048). Both regionally important assets as categorised by the NIAH. Rosmead House was constructed in 1720, by the Wood family. It is a seven bay, four storey house, that is located within

designed grounds surrounding the Stonyford River. It is located within the site boundary, 250m to the south of Turbine 8. A full assessment of the protected structure and any potential impacts from the proposed development will be undertaken as part of the EIAR.

In relation to the European sites, the prospective applicant stated that there are a total of 9 SACs and 2 SPAs within 20 km. The closest SACs and SPAs are the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA, Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC, Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC, and Lough Lene SAC. There are also 5 NHAs and 13 pNHAs within 20 km. The most proximate NHAs and pNHAs are Lough Shesk pNHA, Girley Bog NHA, and Aghalasty Fen pNHA.

The prospective applicant elaborated on the habitats and species for which the above sites are designated including. Annex 1 transition mire and quaking bogs (7140), alkaline fens (7230) and calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallinae* (7210) in north and east and possible Ancient Woodlands of oak-ash-hazel woodland (WN2) of (mixed) broadleaved woodland (WD1) type in the south. Other habitat types across the site include conifer plantation (WD4), improved agricultural grassland (GA1), bog woodland (WN7), scrub (WS1), treelines (WL2), hedgerows (WL1), dry calcareous and neutral grassland (GS1), immature woodland (WS2), depositing/lowland rivers (FW2), drainage ditches (FW4) and eutrophic ponds (FL5).

The prospective applicant stated that bird surveys were conducted from May 2019 to September 2021 inclusive (three breeding seasons and two non-breeding seasons). Consultation with NPWS was undertaken by MKO in April and December 2019 and April 2020. Stated that the survey methodology and study area are in accordance with latest NatureScot (formerly SNH, 2017) guidance. This will provide the required two years of bird survey data collected in the last five years and data for one additional breeding season.

All Irish bat species (except lesser horseshoe) were recorded during surveys. Two minor summer roosts of common and soprano pipistrelle were recorded at the proposed development. Results of static detector surveys 2022 are pending.

Non-volant mammals as badger (setts near river Stoneyford, and in Ancient Woodlands), red squirrel and red fox recorded during surveys. Habitats suitable for pine marten, Irish hare, hedgehogs, Irish stoat, and otter. Invertebrates such as Marsh fritillary butterfly recorded in NW of proposed development. Suitable breeding habitat and larval webs confirmed. For reptiles and amphibians, a suitable habitat for common frog, smooth newt and common lizard was found. Amphibian results pending.

The aquatic results are pending (including results from electrofishing, eDNA, DNA metabarcoding, Q-sampling, white-clawed crayfish surveys and stage 1 and 2 freshwater pearl mussel surveys).

Regarding plants, no rare or protected species recorded by surveys to date. However invasive species including Japanese knotweed have been recorded outside the site and cherry laurel, and snowberry within or near to the proposed development.

The prospective applicant stated that the proposed wind farm is located within Boyne catchment (ID 07). The main hydrology features within and adjacent to the proposed wind farmlands are the River Stonyford (ID 07_220) and its tributary D'Arcy crossroad streams which forms the western boundary of the site. These features are part of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (ID 002299).

The prospective applicant stated that the National Indicative Fluvial Mapping (NIFM) identifies an area of low-lying ground in the northern part of the site which may be liable to flooding and that a Stage 3 Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) is now underway. The FRA hydraulic model will identify the extent of the flood zones and flood depths at the site and will in turn inform the scheme design. The aquifer underlying the study area is classified by the GSI as Locally Important Aquifer (LI), which is bedrock which is moderately productive only in local zones. This refers to the Lucan Formation Calp bedrock of dark limestone and shale. The GSI shows the presence of localised eskers across the study area. These are not classified as aquifers and there is no gravel aquifer in the study area.

Regarding the evolution of the design, the prospective applicant stated that the project has gone through several design iterations over 2018, 2021 and 2022. These

iterations looked at variations in turbine number and tip height to deliver 50MW (2018: 12 no. turbine, 150m TH; 2021: 3 no. turbine, 200m TH; proposed: 8 no. turbines, 170m TH). The micro siting to account for Annex 1 habitat, Marsh fritillary butterfly, related breeding habitat, badger setts presence, ancient woodland, flooding, and proximity of adjacent national route. Further amendments expected as a result of the EIA process and public consultation.

Regarding the legislative and policy context for renewable energy, the prospective applicant referred to recent and significant proposals and updates, including the REPower EU Plan and the EU Green Deal. The prospective applicant also referred to the Climate Action Plan 2021 with its targets in respect of 2030 and 2050.

With respect to the national and local planning policy context (NPF & RSES), the prospective applicant noted that the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 came into effect in May 2021. The prospective applicant referred to several national policy objectives (21, 54, 55, RPO9) and energy policies objectives (CPO 10.139, CPO 10.140, CPO 10.141, CPO 10.142, CPO 10.143, CPO 10.144, CPO 10.146, CPO 10.147, CPO 10.148,).

The prospective applicant advised that the OPR considers policy objective CPO 10.132 to be contrary to government policy on wind energy development having regard to Ministerial guidance on wind farm development and in particular the inclusion of required separation distances between wind turbines and residential dwellings. The Planning Authority was requested to omit policy objective CPO 10.132 in its entirety from Chapter 10 of the CDP, however this request was not complied with, and a draft Ministerial Direction has been published for public consultation directing the removal of CPO 10.132 and related separation distances.

The prospective applicants noted a recent precedent case, Bracklyn Wind Farm, County Westmeath (ABP311565-21), whereby the Planning Inspector highlighted that on foot of this draft Ministerial Direction, it can be reasonably argued that the policy objective no longer forms part of the development plan on the basis that it does not sit comfortably with national policy in relation to increasing renewable energy capacity and with the guidance contained in both the 2006 Guidelines and the 2019 Guidelines.

With regard to the SID status of the proposed development, the prospective applicant highlighted the proposed total power output of the project (circa 52.8 megawatts) and stated its opinion that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure. With regard to the criteria set out under section 37A (2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the prospective applicant stated its opinion that the proposed development would qualify as SID as it would be of strategic economic or social importance to the region in which it would be situated and would also contribute to the fulfilment of National and Regional planning objectives. The prospective applicant also noted the project is largely contained within the jurisdiction of Westmeath County Council; however, part of the grid connection will be located west of Clonmellon within the Meath County boundary. Therefore, contended that the proposed development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

With respect to consultation and community engagement, the prospective applicant said that an EIAR Scoping Report is due to be distributed in October 2022 to both statutory and non-statutory bodies. Consultations with the local communities are due to commence in Q4 2022. Consultation activities will be carried over two stages, stage one will include information website and leaflet drops, and stage two will include updated information website and door to door consultation. The prospective applicant advised of its current target to lodge a subsequent planning application circa Q1 2023.

Discussion/Queries

The Board's representative noted the detailed presentation delivered by the prospective applicant and raised a number of issues.

With regard to the development plan and policies relating to wind energy, the Board's representative advised the prospective applicant to address issues regard to the Ministerial Direction issued in any application and ensure that clarity is provided with regard to policy objective CPO 10.143 (not CPO 10.132 as stated on presentation).

In response to the Board's query on the matter, the prospective applicant said that there is no history of a large-scale commercial peat extraction on the subject site.

The Board's representatives enquired about the 80ha of private plantation and native woodland if the area will be affected. The prospective applicant said that there will be felling in this area and that they are in the process of identifying an indicative area for that felling and for the replacement lands. Stated that any felling would not involve any of the native or ancient woodlands. With respect to any tree felling required to facilitate proposed turbines, the prospective applicant said that this would be kept to a minimum and that appropriate mitigation (re-planting) would be applied.

Regarding the delivery route the Board's representative enquired about the 3 no. access points, there are a number of pinch points on local roads including narrow bridge crossings. The prospective applicant confirmed that these areas would be avoided as far as possible.

In response to the Board query on the matter, the prospective applicant gave a brief description of the two meetings held to date with Westmeath County Council involving representatives of the Planning and Roads departments. Stated that further follow up meetings regarding details of the access arrangements and works required for the delivery route are planned.

The prospective applicant stated that they have not engaged directly with TII to date. Stated that a meeting has been sought and on confirmation the applicant will prepare a specific information package for TII. The prospective applicant confirmed that there have been no public consultations to date.

Noting the location of the site in close proximity to the boundary with the Meath County Council administrative area, the Board's representative advised the prospective applicant to give consideration of visual impacts, landscape designations and any hydrological links that may impact on this local authority area. It was also advised that cumulative landscape and visual impacts with other permitted and constructed windfarms and developments in area (e.g. permitted SID case ABP 311565-21 for 9 turbines southeast of Devlin - Bracklyn Wind Farm) should be addressed as well as consideration of the impact on the setting of Rosmead House (RPS 009-048) – and adjoining arched gateway.

The Board representatives noted that the proposed access track to T1, T2, T3 is close to National monument WM00528 (Rath) and that there is a requirement for

assessment of the impact on these monuments and archaeological investigations. In addition, T5 is proposed in close proximity to WM00529 (enclosure/fort). The surrounding area is rich in archaeological remains including recorded monuments, applicant should address risks to archaeology in the area.

The Board representative advised the prospective applicant to give due consideration to European sites, proximate to the site include the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code: 002299). Noted that the site is sensitive to any impacts on aquatic environment as a result of run off, sediment, pollution etc. Noted that qualifying interest of this SAC include salmon, otter and river lamprey which rely on water courses nearby the proposed site.

The Boards representatives noted that the main areas of alkaline fen in this SAC site are concentrated in the vicinity of Newtown Lough which borders the proposed site and may be liable to impacts as a result of run off. In addition, Lough Shesk and Lough Freehan are also located within the immediate vicinity to the west of the site and are connected hydrologically via the Stoneyford River and field drains. Noted that any fluctuations in PH within this water system could have a detrimental impact on this habitat. The rare plant Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) occurs around Newtown Lough. This species is listed in the Red Data Book and this site represents its only occurrence in Co. Meath.

The Board also noted the provisions of the Water Framework Directive and the levels of risk to the current status of relevant waterbodies. Notably, STONYFORD_010 – at risk of failing to meet WFD objectives by 2027 and needs to be considered. Also, hydrogeological impacts will have to be addressed and how drainage on the site is to be implemented and monitored, given presence of potential hydrological links to nearby designated sites.

The Board's representatives advised that the Climate Chapter of the EIAR should adequately outline the carbon resources required to construct the proposed development and outline what the savings are by displacement of fossil fuel generated electricity. Figures could be calculated using a life cycle analysis with regard to materials and transportation.

Based on the information presented, the Boards representatives stated that it was their preliminary opinion that the proposed development was likely SID. Stated that the final determination regarding the SID status of the proposed development would however be made by the Board at the closure of the pre application process.

Given the anticipated time period for submission of an application and the ongoing consultations being undertaken by the prospective applicant, the Board's representatives recommended that the current pre-app case be kept open for the present time and said that a further meeting could be accommodated in respect of updates on the projects and feedback from stakeholders and relevant prescribed bodies. The prospective applicant queried whether the Boards representatives would be in a position to provide advice regarding design parameters for the purposes of the application and EIA as provided for under the Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act, 2022. In response, the Board's representatives noted that the relevant provisions of this Act had not yet commenced, and that implementing Regulations were required. The Board is therefore not currently prepared to implement this section of the legislation.

It was noted that the proposed grid connection and 110kv underground substation are intended to form part of the planning application and the Boards representatives recommended that this element should be considered in the EIAR from a cumulative effects perspective.

The prospective applicant indicated that it was likely their intention to seek an further meeting to discuss further planning and environmental considerations relating to the project.

Conclusions

The record of the meeting will issue to the prospective applicant, and it will then be a matter for the prospective applicant to submit any comments on this if it wishes to do so. It will be a matter for the prospective applicant to request a further meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12:10 p.m.

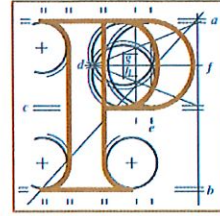


Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning

Our Case Number: ABP-314271-22

Your Reference: Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited



**An
Bord
Pleanála**

SLR Consulting Ireland
7 Dundrum Business Park
Dundrum
Dublin 14
D14 N2Y7

RECEIVED

16 MAR 2023

Date: 15th March 2023

Re: Proposed 52.8 MW Wind Farm including 8 no. turbines, Grid Connection and 110kv loop-in/loop-out electricity substation
Located approx. 1km southwest of Clonmellon and 1.6km northeast of Devlin, in Counties Westmeath and Meath

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have been asked by An Bord Pleanála to refer further to the above-mentioned pre-application consultation request.

Please find enclosed a copy of the written record of the second meeting of the 6th March, 2023.

If you have any queries in relation to the matter please contact the undersigned officer of the Board.

Please quote the above-mentioned An Bord Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Board.

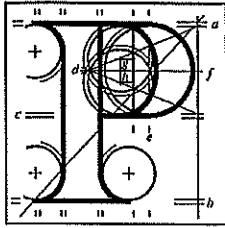
Yours faithfully,

Doina Chiforescu
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737133

PC07

Tel	Tel	(01) 858 8100
Glaó Áitiúil	LoCall	1800 275 175
Facs	Fax	(01) 872 2684
Láithreán Gréasáin	Website	www.pleanala.ie
Ríomhphost	Email	bord@pleanala.ie

64 Sráid Maoilbhríde	64 Marlborough Street
Baile Átha Cliath 1	Dublin 1
D01 V902	D01 V902



An
Bord
Pleanála

**Record of 2nd Meeting
ABP-314271-22**

Case Reference / Description	ABP-314271-22 Proposed 52.8 MW Wind Farm including 8 no. turbines, Grid Connection and 110kv loop-in/loop-out electricity substation, located approx. 1km southwest of Clonmellon and 1.6km northeast of Devlin, in Counties Westmeath and Meath		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th Meeting	2 nd		
Date	06/03/23	Start Time	10:15 a.m.
Location	Virtually	End Time	11:15 p.m.

Representing An Bord Pleanála		
Staff Members		
Stephen Kay, Assistant Director of Planning (Chair)		
Máire Daly, Planning Inspector		
Eimear Reilly, Executive Officer	e.reilly@pleanala.ie	01-8737184
Representing the Prospective Applicant		
Charles Sawyer, Statkraft		
Aislinn O'Brien, SRL Consulting		
Crystal Leiker, SRL Consulting		

Introduction

The Board referred to its previous meeting with the applicant, which was held on 5th October 2022, and to the record of this meeting. The Board enquired whether the prospective applicant had any comments it wished to make on the record of this meeting. The prospective applicant replied that it had some points of clarification to make and noted that these would be made throughout the presentation at the instant meeting.

Presentation made by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant gave a brief recap of the proposed development, followed by a presentation on progress made since the last meeting in October. They began the progress update by noting that an informal EIA scoping process was carried out and by explaining that an EIA Scoping Report was then circulated to both statutory and non-statutory bodies between 9th November and 10th December 2022. It was also noted that further environmental survey work has taken place and was highlighted that there have been updates to the overall design of the proposed development.

In relation to next steps, the prospective applicant stated that a consultation with local communities is due to commence in March 2023 and noted that consultation activities will include an information website and leaflet drops. The preparation of a draft EIA will then commence, followed by a further consultation with the public in May/June 2023. The planning application and EIA will then be finalised, with the application expected to be submitted to the Board in Q2 of 2023.

The prospective applicant stated that it has received responses from Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Meath County Council, Inland Fisheries Ireland, and NPWS, in relation to its EIA Scoping Report. It outlined these responses as follows:

1. Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII):

TII noted that the site adjoins the N52 national road, along with the policy concerning access to national roads. TII requested the prospective applicant consult with the Local Authority/ National Roads Design Office with regard to the N52 Cavestown to Kilrush Scheme. It also requested that the grid connection and cable routing be

developed to safeguard this road scheme. It then requested that the prospective applicant include any methods/techniques for any works traversing/in proximity to the national road network, along with consideration for whether a Road Safety Audit is required for any of the temporary works proposed. The prospective applicant informed the Board's representatives that following these requests, the prospective applicant held two meetings with the local authority/National Roads Design Office, during which, design amendments regarding depth/design of cabling have been agreed, in principle, in order to facilitate further setback of relevant turbines. It also noted that precedent for new access has been agreed by the Board in relation to Derrinlough Windfarm (Planning Authority Register Ref.:14/188, ABP Ref. PL19.244053)

2. Meath County Council:

Meath County Council asked the prospective applicant to consider the Meath County Development Plan policies, namely:

- o Ch 6 Infrastructure Strategy (INF POL 41), Ch 8 Cultural and Natural Heritage Strategy, Ch 10 Climate Change Strategy and Ch 11 Development Management Standards (11.8.1 and 11.8.3 and 11.8.4), CDP Appendices (A.05, A.06, A.09, A.10) and Volume 3 Book of Maps which are associated with the Appendices (including Map 8.6 Views and Prospects, etc.) and other relevant parts of the CDP.

It recommended that an Ecological Impact Assessment, Invasive Species Management Plan, and Habitat and Species Management Plan be carried out as part of the EIA process.

In relation to the proposed substation, the location of which has been amended and now falls within its jurisdiction, the Meath Co Co response also noted the elevated position of the site in the landscape and ringfort which adjoins the site. They have also asked the prospective applicant to consider the viewpoints from localised high points such as Peoples Park (Kells) and have requested consideration of character areas in the region of the site and potential capacity for the South-West Kells Lowlands. They also requested that the EIAR considers tourism assets/impacts in

the region, including those identified in Failte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ancient East strategies.

Meath County Council advised the prospective applicant to avoid locating turbines within a fen peat/Annex 1 habitat but stated that this is to be explored in the Natura Impact Statement. They have identified an area of the site to be a flood risk area and have requested a number of elements to be included in the Construction Environment Management Plan:

- o Surface Water Quality Management Plan, Water Protection and Monitoring Protocol, Site Drainage Management and Emergency Silt Control and Spillage Response Procedures.
- o Dust Control Suppression Strategy
- o The use of a Windfarm Carbon Assessment Tool.
- o An Archaeological Assessment to be carried out.
- o Consideration given to noise (max) limits in draft Wind Energy Guidelines 2019
- o Traffic / Transportation Management Plan required

The prospective applicant stated that it has addressed some of these requests to date by carrying out further micro siting and by avoiding sensitive habitat i.e. Annex 1 and Marsh Fritillary near T1. It has also carried out a Stage 3 flood risk assessment and are currently finalising a Detailed Drainage Survey to consider appropriate mitigation and to inform the CEMP. A geophysical survey is currently underway for the substation site while landscape mitigation being developed for this site will include 2 / 3 additional viewpoints.

3. Inland Fisheries Ireland

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) noted the potential for the proposed development to impact a wide range of fisheries waters on the Rivers Stonyford, Athboy and Boyne including areas designated as SAC's, angling waters, adult holding areas, nursery and spawning waters, etc. forming parts of the Eastern River Basin District. IFI also noted that some turbines are sited adjacent to a range of smaller watercourses which act primarily as contributories to downstream habitat for juvenile salmonids, lampreys and other species as well as macrophytes, algae and macroinvertebrates which as drift form a significant part of the food supply to the downstream fisheries.

IFI have requested the following:

- that all watercourses that traverse the proposed development during site development and road construction works should be effectively bridged prior to commencement,
- that works in rivers, streams and watercourses be carried out during the period of July-September in order to minimise adverse impacts (except in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of IFI),
- that the soil type and structure at the proposed turbine locations, and along the route of any proposed access track(s)/road(s) including areas where temporary or permanent stock piling of excavated material takes place, be assessed and reviewed. IFI noted that this is particularly important if the areas concerned contain peat soils.
- That systems be put in place to ensure that there shall be no discharge of suspended solids or any other deleterious matter to watercourses during the construction / operational phase and during any landscaping works. IFI noted that a number of requirements for construction and operation were listed in relation to this concern.
- That pre-cast concrete be used wherever possible during construction to avoid alteration of pH of water,
- that biosecurity measures be put in place during construction phase to avoid spread of invasive species, and
- that no in-stream works take place without written approval from IFI.

In response to these requests, the prospective applicant stated that it has avoided the need for river-crossings and has carried out the Stage 3 flood risk assessment, and the Detailed Drainage Survey.

4. NPWS

The NPWS requested that bird surveys include the use of avian radar systems to detect nocturnal birds, and the use of avian acoustic sound meters to record and interpret sonograms in the context of the flightlines of migrating geese. It also requested that bat surveys be carried out to account for species such as Leisler bat which mostly fly at a high altitude. It also requested that the EIAR assess impacts on

amber and red-listed species; areas of High Nature Value (HNV) land; compliance with Article 10 of the EU Habitats Directive in terms of protection of stepping stones and wildlife corridors in the landscape.

In response to these requests, the prospective applicant stated that the NPWS were consulted annually on bird surveys methodology and that no issues were raised during these consultations. They also stated that their respective ecology team have noted that meaningful nocturnal surveys for birds is not feasible and that this is consistent with the NatureScot, 2022 guidance. It stated that guidance recommends that radar is only used to assess sites where there is likely to be high nocturnal activity of important species, especially if a SPA qualifying species is potentially affected and subsequently that there is no evidence to suggest the site has a high level of nocturnal bird activity. Finally, they noted that a bat detector will be deploying at a height from May to September 2023.

The prospective applicant then provided updates on the following surveys:

1. Ecology – Aquatic baseline report & Fisheries report (February 2023)

This survey concluded that watercourses at the site had been historically (and often extensively) straightened and deepened, impacting their hydromorphology and exacerbating agricultural pressures. It also noted that the majority of riverine sites (11 no.) in the vicinity of the proposed development were evaluated as international importance by virtue of their location within the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299) but these were not always of inherently high aquatic value (e.g. sites A2, B1, B2, B4). The survey also concluded that the majority of pond sites were evaluated as local importance (lower value) due to agricultural activity and poor connectivity to adjoining high quality habitat.

In relation to aquatic habitats, the survey concluded that there were no examples of Annex 1 aquatic vegetation habitats, nor were any rare/protected aquatic macrophytes, macroinvertebrates (other than whiteclawed crayfish), or aquatic bryophytes recorded. It noted that Salmonids and Lampetra species were widespread but in low densities, that white-clawed crayfish were recorded on in Athboy river, and that a crayfish plague was recorded in D'arcy's Crossroads stream

and Stonyford River. There were low numbers of otters recorded, but no holts or couches.

The survey concluded less than satisfactory biological water quality at all but four sites, and noted that European eel was recorded at Newtown Lough while, with the exception of crayfish, there were no recorded invasive species.

2. Soils and Geology - Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment (January 2023)

This survey found that two peat areas at the site required further investigation: north of the site, underlying T1, and south of the site, underlying T7. Previous mapping by Teagasc has identified the northern peat area as fen peat, and the southern area as cut peat. These areas were selected for further investigation. Peat probing and sampling was carried out in October 2022. The peat survey at the south area, mapped as cut bog, found no peat. In the northern area, the peat was found to vary in terms of thickness and coverage but generally limited to flat expanses. Peat across the area varies in terms of thickness, from 0.1m to 4.0m. 87% of the area surveyed either has no peat developed or has a peat thickness of <1.5m. There is one small area (c. 35m by 25m) of relatively thick peat identified immediately south proposed turbine location T1.

These results recommended that the proposed access track be adjusted to avoid this area, and that further probing should be used to identify an alternative route. It should be noted that the required adjustment is likely to be minimal. The prospective applicant noted that the hazard from peat instability at the site will be negligible if the recommendations are to be adopted.

3. Water and Hydrology – Flood Risk Assessment (January 2023) & Detailed Drainage Survey (March 2023)

This survey noted a flood depth of 0.04m is minimal / marginal at T1. Following this, the prospective applicant intends to raise the base of the turbine for at least 500mm above the design flood level to compensate for assumptions applied in the hydraulic model. It also noted that the hardstanding and access track to T1 should be at existing ground level so that it will not impact on flood levels.

The prospective applicant noted that both the at height monitoring for bats survey (May – Sept 2023), and the Geophysical Survey at the substation location (March 2023) are yet to be completed.

The prospective applicant provided a design update, stating the changes to each turbine and that it is now proposed to have an increased tip height of up to 180m and an increased rotor diameter of up to 162m, and the potential to generate up to 7.2MW of power. They noted that Impact Assessment in relation to this will be based on “worst case” dimensions.

They also stated that a revised access area to the northern cluster is proposed via the N52 and the local road L5542 which passes through the townland of Carnybrogan, while access to the Southern cluster is proposed via the N52 and the local road L5542.

In addition to this, the substation is now relocated west of Clonmellon, near the existing 110 kV Overhead Line and the grid route has been revised from a 110kV underground grid connection to a 33kV grid route. This relocation reduces impact on the N52, when compared to 110kV grid connection. The prospective applicant noted that engagement with National Roads Authority and National Roads Design Office was undertaken and is ongoing in relation to this.

The prospective applicant outlined some recent legislative updates which it deems significant in relation to the proposed development. They provided a recap on the changes made to the REPowerEU Plan which focuses on accelerating the rollout of renewables, as well as changes made to Irish legislation which included the enactment of Planning and Development, Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act 2022 and the Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022. They also outlined policy changes in relation to the Climate Action Plan 2021 and Climate Action Plan 2023, which aims to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030 and a target of 9 GW from onshore wind, 8 GW from solar, and at least 5 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030.

In relation to the Westmeath Planning Policy and its Ministerial Direction, the prospective applicant explained that the wind energy policy objective CPO 10.143 was to be deleted and additional policy objective was to be added regarding an

assessment of how the “implementation of the Development Plan 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) within 6 months of the date of the Minister’s Direction”.

The prospective applicant highlighted that part 2(ii) of the Draft Direction is now excluded from the direction due to Action 102 of the Climate Action Plan 2021 – this relates to the commitment to publish a framework to set out targets for onshore renewable electricity development to inform spatial plans. The timeline for the publication of the framework is Q1 of 2023.

The prospective applicant outlined some policy objectives in relation to the Meath Planning Policy, including an objective to encourage the development of wind energy, in accordance with Government policy (INF POL 41) and to support Ireland’s renewable energy commitments outlined in national policy by facilitating the development and exploitation of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydro and bio-energy (INF OBJ 39).

The prospective applicant maintained their opinion that the proposed development would likely constitute strategic infrastructure development, stating that the development falls within the scope of s.37A(2) (a), (b), and (c) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

Discussion:

The following matters were discussed:

- The Board’s representatives acknowledged the prospective applicant’s intention to submit the planning application for the proposed development in Q2 of 2023, however, they also queried if this would be possible as the bat surveys are scheduled to take place from May to September 2023. The prospective applicant replied that there is a possibility that this target could be delayed due to finalising of the surveys but clarified that it is still operating on the intent to lodge in Q2 and that any additional survey information may be provided following submission.

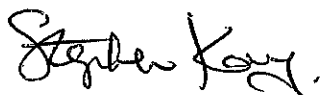
- The Board's representative's sought clarity regarding the design flexibility of the proposed turbines. In response to a specific query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant replied that the three design options would be outlined and assessed in the EIAR and that the results presented would be based on the "worst-case" option.
- The Board's representatives advised that their initial opinion that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure development remains following the information provided by the prospective applicant at the instant meeting.
- Following a query regarding consultation with Westmeath County Council, the prospective applicant clarified that it has met with and presented the outline of proposed development to the local authority, and that it will provide a further update on the changes discussed in the instant meeting. It also noted that it met with Westmeath County Council's Road Design Office twice but did not receive a written response to its scoping report.
- In relation to archaeology of the site, the Board's representative's queried whether a response was received from the Department. The prospective applicant confirmed that no response was received.
- Following a query from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that the bat surveys would be deployed for a continuous period between May and September. In response, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to provide rationale in the application if its view was that the advice provided by NPWS is not warranted to be undertaken in relation to the nocturnal bird surveys.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that the new proposed access point is 400m further south of that originally proposed. In response, the Board's representatives asked if TII gave any indication that it would object to this access point. The prospective applicant replied that TII was provided with a detailed info pack including drawings of the access points and that in response, it noted the policy and asked the prospective applicant to revert to the Road Design Office in line with the road alignment scheme.
- The prospective applicant stated that it intends to keep the pre-application consultation process open until its draft EIAR chapters are finalised. It stated

that it will begin to draft these chapters following a community consultation which is due to take place at the end of March 2023.

- In relation to a question from the prospective applicant regarding the commencement date of design flexibility as provided for in the Planning and Development Maritime Valuation (Amendment) Act, 2022, the Board's representatives advised that the Board has not been given clear indication as to when the provisions relating to applications under s.37 of the Act will commence. In lieu of this information, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to proceed on the basis that the identified potential design options will be assessed and presented in the EIAR.

Conclusions

The Board's representatives advised that the record of the meeting will issue to the prospective applicant, and that the onus is on the prospective applicant to submit any comments on this if it wishes to do so. The onus is also on the prospective applicant to request a further meeting or to request closure of the pre-application consultation process.



Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning

