



An
Bord
Pleanála

Appropriate Assessment: Screening Determination

ABP-315836-23

Development

Application received under Section 4 of the Development (Emergency Electricity Generation) Act 2022 for a designated development located at West Offaly Power Station, Shannonbridge, in the townland of Cloniffeen, Co. Offaly

Location

West Offaly Power Station at Shannonbridge

Applicant(s)

Electricity Supply Board

1.1. Stage 1 - Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The competent authority must be satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site. This section of the assessment considers the likelihood of significant effects on European Sites from the construction operation of and commissioning of the designated development.

1.2. Description of Site and Development

The Development in question comprises of the installation of 8 no. 35 MW nominal capacity gas turbine generators (LM 2500Xpress units) and all associated ancillary connection infrastructure including site works and services within the confines of the existing decommissioned West Offaly Power Station at Shannonbridge Co Offaly.

The proposed development is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of a European Site. The application site is not in itself located within a designated Natura 2000 Site, but is located in proximity to the River Shannon, which attracts two separate Natura 2000 Site designations, namely the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (Site Code 004096) and the River Shannon Callows SAC (Site Code 000216). Shannonbridge is also located near the confluence point between the River Suck and the River Shannon. The River Suck, c. 700 m to the west of the application site, is also the subject of a Natura 2000 site designation namely, The River Suck Callows SPA (Site Code 004097). On this basis the application was accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement which included a screening for Appropriate Assessment.

1.3. Screening

The NIS contains a description of the proposed development, the project site and the surrounding area as well as details of the field surveys and the assessment methodology informing the appropriate assessment. It contains a Stage 1 Screening Assessment which concludes that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and an NIS is required, specifically in respect of 3 Natura 2000 sites.

Having reviewed the Stage 1 screening assessment and the supporting documentation, I am satisfied that it provides adequate information in respect of the baseline conditions, clearly identifies the potential impacts, and uses best scientific information and knowledge to assess any potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence. I am satisfied that the information is sufficient to allow the Board screen in/out Natura 2000 site in the area for the purposes of conducting a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

The Stage 1 screening report submitted identifies the following Natura 2000 sites as being potentially within the zone of influence of the proposed development:

- Middle Shannon Callows SPA (Site Code: 004096).

- River Suck Callows SPA (Site Code: 004097).
- River Shannon Callows SAC (Site Code 000216).
- Mongan Bog SPA (Site Code 004017).
- Mongan Bog SAC (Site Code 000580).
- Moyclare Bog SAC (Site Code 000581).
- Glenloughaun Esker SAC (Site Code 002213).
- Redwood Bog SAC (Site Code 002353).
- All Saints Bog SPA (Site Code 004103).
- Little Brosna Callows SPA (Site Code 004086)
- All Saints Bog and Esker (000566)
- Ferbane Bog SAC (Site Code 000575).
- Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (Site Code; 000576).
- Castle Sampson Esker SAC (Site Code 001625).
- Glenoughan Esker SAC (Site Code) 002213

The Table set out below, screens in / out the potential for the proposed development to impact on the Natura 2000 sites in question. The extent to which the proposed development could impact on the integrity of the qualifying interests / species of conservation interest (QI's/ SCI's) in question is assessed in the context of the nature of the QI's/SCI's, the distance between the Natura 2000 Sites and the proposal and the nature of the potential adverse impact which could occur during either the construction or operational phase.

Natura 2000 Site	Distance (closest point)	QI's/ SCI's	Potential for adverse Impact	Screen in/out
Middle Shannon Callows SPA	25 meters	Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus) [A038] Wigeon (Anas penelope) [A050]	Potential for disturbance of species through noise and disturbance during both the construction and operational Phase.	In

		<p>Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122]</p> <p>Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140]</p> <p>Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142]</p> <p>Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156]</p> <p>Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	Potential for water pollution could also occur through accidental spillage during the construction phase.	
River Suck Callows SPA	670 meters	<p>Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038]</p> <p>Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) [A050]</p> <p>Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140]</p> <p>Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142]</p> <p>Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	Potential for disturbance of species through noise and disturbance during both the construction and operational Phase	In
River Shannon Callows SAC	15 metres	<p>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinia caerulea</i>) [6410]</p> <p>Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion,</p>	Potential for water pollution episode could occur through accidental spillage during the construction phase. This could potentially impact on the habitat of the otter. There is no potential to impact on the other habitats that form part of the qualifying interests associated with the SAC.	In

		Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]		
Mongan Bog SPA	7.5km	Greenland White-fronted Goose (Anser albifrons flavirostris) [A395]	This bird species does not frequent, breed, nest or forage in the vicinity of the power station.	Out
Little River Brosna Callows SPA	11.8km	Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus) [A038] Wigeon (Anas penelope) [A050] Teal (Anas crecca) [A052] Pintail (Anas acuta) [A054] Shoveler (Anas clypeata) [A056] Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria) [A140] Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus) [A142] Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa) [A156] Black-headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus) [A179] Greenland White-fronted Goose (Anser albifrons flavirostris) [A395] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	This section of the River Brosna although hydrologically connected to the site it is located upstream, therefore there is no potential to impact on habitats. The site is located within the feeding range of Pintail, however there are no habitats within the site that are suitable for feeding /roosting or nesting within the proposed development site for any of the qualifying interests associated with the SPA.	Out
Mongan Bog SAC	7.5 km	Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out
Moyclare Bog SPA	10.5km	Greenland White-fronted Goose (Anser albifrons flavirostris) [A395]	The subject site is not a suitable habitat to accommodate this species	Out

Glenloughaun Esker SAC	14.6 km	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out
Redwood Bog SAC	13.3 km	Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out
All Saints Bog SPA	13.4 km	Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395]	This bird species does not frequent, breed, nest or forage in the vicinity of the power station.	Out
All Saints Bog and Esker SAC	13.4 km	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210] Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150] Bog woodland [91D0]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out
Ferbane Bog SAC	13.3km	Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out
Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC	7.1 km	Alkaline fens [7230] Vertigo geyeri (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential	Out

			for adverse impacts to occur.	
Castlesampson Esker SAC	14.3 km	Turloughs [3180] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	Due to the separation distances between the subject site and the nature of the qualifying interests there is no potential for adverse impacts to occur.	Out

The Stage One Screening Report also included 4 additional Natura 2000 sites namely:

- The Lough Derg, North-East Shore SAC (site code: 002241) – c.24 km away (hydrological distance c.34km). c.24 km away (hydrological distance c.34km).
- The Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA (site code:00458) c.24 km away (hydrological distance c.34km).
- Lower River Shannon SAC (site code: 002165) c.58km away (hydrological distance c.>150km).
- River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (site code 004077) c. 80km away (hydrological distance >150km).

On the basis of the separation distances involved and the level of dilution and dispersion available in the receiving waters, I consider that the proposed development poses no potential impact on the qualifying interests, or the species of conservation interest associated with the Natura 2000 Site in question.

1.4. In Combination Effects

Developments that are currently permitted, under construction or planned within the WOP that have potential for in-combination effects are:

- Constructed BESS facility (Offaly planning ref 17/278, amended 19/56)
- Planned BESS facility (Offaly planning ref 21/295)
- Remediation works on Site as required by IE license. Licensed Works will include removal of historic asbestos waste and treatment off Site.
- West Offaly Power Station Demolition Project and Development of Grid Services (planning application PL2/22/223)

Individual Appropriate Assessment exercises were undertaken in respect of the each of the projects referred to above, in each case it was concluded that there were no potential for significant effects on the SAC/SPA's in the area.

1.5. Screening Determination Conclusion

On the basis of the information on file, including the AA Screening Report and supporting information, it is recommended that the Board make a Screening Determination as follows:

In accordance with Article 42(6) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, on the basis of the information on file, including the AA Screening Report, submitted as part of the NIS and supporting information, and having regard to:

- the nature and scale of the designated development,
- the close proximity between the proposed works to a number of Natura 2000 Sites in the vicinity and their conservation objectives.

It is concluded that the designated development comprising the construction of Emergency Electricity Generation development at the West of Offaly Power Station at Shannonbridge Co Offaly, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, could potentially have a significant effect on the following Natura 2000 sites in view of these sites' conservation objectives.

Namely:

- Middle Shannon Callows SPA (Site Code: 004096).
- River Suck Callows SPA (Site Code: 004097).
- River Shannon Callows SAC (Site Code 000216).

The potential for significant effects on the conservation objectives of other Natura 2000 sites within and outside of the zone of influence can be screened out with confidence because of the separation distances and the lack of substantive ecological linkages or pathways between the proposed works and other Natura 2000 sites. In reaching the conclusion of the screening assessment, no account was taken of measures intended to avoid or reduce the potentially harmful effects of the project on any European Site.

Paul Caprani

Senior Planning Inspector

21st February 2023