

Record Of Meeting

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Case Reference/ Description	09.PC0148 – Proposed Greenwire Project comprising over 40 wind farms, cable collector system and converter station, and underground cables to two grid connection points in Wales. Counties Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Meath, Westmeath, Dublin, Carlow and Wexford.		
Case Type:	Section 37B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended		
1st/2nd/3rd Meeting:	2 nd Meeting		
Date:	7 th March 2013	Start Time:	2.00 p.m.
Location:	Conference Room, An Bord Pleanála	End Time:	3.20 p.m.
Chairperson:	Des Johnson, Director of Planning	Executive Officer:	Sinéad McInerney

Attendees:
Representing An Bord Pleanála
Des Johnson, Director of Planning
Philip Green, Assistant Director of Planning
Marcella Doyle, Senior Executive Officer
Sinéad McInerney, Executive Officer
Representing Prospective Applicant
Tim Cowhig, Chief Executive Officer, Element Power
Kevin O'Donovan, Chief Development Officer, Element Power
Ria Lyden, Head of Environmental and Planning, Arups
Tina Raleigh, Technical Director, Fehily Timoney and Co.
Clodagh O'Donovan, Head of Environment and Energy, Fehily Timoney and Co.

Record Of Meeting

**PRIVATE &
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An Bord Pleanála



Introduction

The prospective applicant was welcomed and the teams were introduced (Appendix 1)

The Board's representatives explained that it's team had changed as the Senior Planning Inspector who had attended the 1st pre-application consultation meeting was no longer available and, in the interest of continuity, Philip Green, Assistant Director of Planning, who had chaired that earlier meeting, will now be the reporting inspector in respect of the case and Des Johnson, Director of Planning, will chair the meetings.

The Board's representatives acknowledged receipt of the further information submitted by the prospective applicant on 26th November 2012, along with comments on the record of the 1st pre-application consultation meeting, which was held on 14th September 2012. The prospective applicant stated that it had no further comments to make in respect of that record. The Board's representatives also acknowledged receipt of project newsletters on 11th December 2012 and 8th February 2013.

Feedback from Strategic Infrastructure Division of Board

The Strategic Infrastructure Division of the Board has made the following comments in respect of the proposed development:

- It is the preliminary view of the Board that the proposed development is strategic infrastructure development.
- It is noted that the prospective applicant intends to submit a single application for the proposed development. This is acceptable to the Board and any such application should be made under section 37E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.
- Any such application should relate to the entire project – wind farms, connecting AC cables, converter stations, HVDC cable to the high water mark.
- The environmental impact assessment for any such application should relate to the entire project and also make reference to the undersea cable landfall on the foreshore and routing to Wales.
- The Board notes that it is not the prospective applicant's intention to phase the proposed development or to use the undersea cable as an interconnector.

Record Of Meeting

**PRIVATE &
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An Bord Pleanála



- The Board emphasises the importance for strong national, regional and local policy support for projects of this nature. This would be an important consideration for the Board in deciding any future application.
- The Board notes the prospective applicant's stated engagement with relevant local authorities, National Parks and Wildlife Service and other relevant bodies. The Board encourages such engagement and emphasises the importance of strong public consultation at an early stage of the strategic infrastructure development process.

During this meeting, the Board's representatives anticipated that the prospective applicant would provide an update on the progress of the proposal. It noted that matters still to be determined since the 1st pre-application consultation included location of the converter station, location of the proposed landfall point and the precise location and definition of the proposed wind farm.

Presentation

The prospective applicant acknowledged the comments of the Strategic Infrastructure Division of the Board and provided an update on the status of the proposed development – see hard copy of presentation attached at Appendix 2.

With regard to environmental assessment, preparation of the environmental impact statement commenced in October 2012. Consultation with key stakeholders took place, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), to determine the scope of surveys that should be carried out. Ecological studies commenced on all potential wind farm sites and other studies including turbine layout design and house location surveys were also carried out. Other key environmental studies are now commencing including geotechnical, hydrology and the human environment. It is intended to complete these environmental studies by the end of 2013. Consultations with parties including the NPWS, IFI, Irish Aviation Authority, telecoms operators, Midland regional authorities, county council planning departments and An Taisce have commenced and are ongoing. Consultation with all key stakeholders will take place as the project develops.

In relation to the electrical collector system, design work is taking place with respect to a system of AC underground cables which will connect the wind farms to the converter station. It is intended that these cables will run along public roads. Assessment of site size and what cables/voltage of cables would be required is currently being assessed with lower voltage 40kV cables required at outlier sites.

Record Of Meeting

**PRIVATE &
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An Bord Pleanála



The capacity of the cables will increase as more wind farm sites connect into the system and will increase to 130kV cables, to 200kV cables and to 400kV cables. At the converter stations energy will change from AC to DC and the HVDC cables will run from a central point to North Dublin and North Wexford where they will run across the Irish Sea and connect to the UK grid in Wales. Engineering works are underway to finalise routes and consultations are taking place with local authority road departments in this regard.

In relation to the two converter stations, the prospective applicant stated that they will be located quite close to each other, and may even be adjacent. Two converter stations are required as there will be two HVDC cables, one to North Dublin and one to North Wexford. Large sites are required and if there is an area with sufficient land available the two converter stations will be located adjacent, or quite close to each other. The theoretical electrical design is now complete and the prospective applicant is engaging with the local authorities in respect of laying cables along public roads.

Landfalls in North Dublin and North Wexford on the east coast of Ireland and Pentir and Pembroke on the Welsh coast have been identified. The prospective applicant stated that the landfall in North Dublin is north of Skerries and north of the East-West Interconnector landfall point. The cable will skirt the Rockabill SPA and SAC and run across the Irish Sea to Wales. Applications will be made for foreshore licence, and subsea survey works and environmental studies will be carried out. It is intended that the planning process for the sections of the project located in the UK and Ireland will run concurrently.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Irish and UK governments and this is seen as an important step in progressing the project. It is expected that an intergovernmental agreement will be signed in early 2014. In relation to grid connection, meetings have taken place with both the UK National Grid and also EirGrid. It was stated that the current proposal is to export energy to the UK but at some stage in the future it may be possible to link in the Irish system. Discussions with EirGrid have taken place in this regard with the intention to develop the appropriate infrastructure at this stage.

The prospective applicant aims to have a fully permitted project by 2014 and to complete financing and commence construction in 2015/2016. It intends to have a fully operational wind farm by 2018.

Record Of Meeting

**PRIVATE &
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An Bord Pleanála



Consultations have commenced and are on-going with public bodies, regulatory authorities and other relevant organisations. A project website is updated regularly, three newsletters have issued to date, a project information video has been released, a lo-call helpline set up and there have been press releases and media engagement. With regard to public consultations, the prospective applicant will engage more locally as sites are confirmed and more details become available regarding location of turbines and cable routes. Details of the potential impacts during construction and operational phases will be provided and benefits, both community and national, will be explained. Communities will also be consulted with regard to community benefit schemes which are appropriate to each local community. The project website will continue to be developed and updated and newsletters will issue informing the public on the status of the project as it develops.

The presentation concluded.

Comments and Discussion

Policy

The Board's representatives addressed the issue of policy and stressed that any application for the proposed development should be grounded in local, regional, national and European policy. It acknowledged that while the Department of Energy Communications and Natural Resources' "Strategy for Renewable Energy: 2012-2020" provides for the development of export of renewable energy, there is no specific reference to it in local, regional or national policy with regard to the scale of development currently being proposed. In relation to the status of the intergovernmental agreement between the Irish and UK governments, the Board's representatives stated that, when the agreement is signed, the Board would have regard to same, however it stressed the importance of having such a development broadly grounded in spatial planning policy and referred to the potential requirement of strategic environmental assessment of such policy. It is the prospective applicants understanding that the intergovernmental agreement will be quite specific in nature, addressing relevant planning and technological issues, however the agreement is currently at an early stage. The prospective applicant noted that development plans promote renewable energy in general, but are not specific with regard to what form that would take, or whether it is for the Irish market or for export. The Board's representatives stated that it would be a reasonable interpretation that current development plans are aimed at Irish renewable energy targets and not for export. The Board has significant regard to policy when making decisions in relation to strategic infrastructure and it is considered that any policy supporting the proposed

Record Of Meeting

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development should be included at national, regional and local level. While the Board is not a strategic environmental assessment authority, the requirement for strategic environmental assessment also raises some concerns and should be addressed by the prospective applicant.

Legal Matters

In relation to wind farm locations, the Board's representatives consider it to be of importance that the prospective applicant demonstrates in any application that it has sufficient legal interest in each of the sites in order to carry out the proposed development. With regard to the routing of cables along public roads, the Board's representatives also queried if there is an ownership issue with regard to the laying and servicing of such cables. The prospective applicant understands that it requires a road opening licence from the relevant local authority and the Board's representatives stated that as a non-statutory undertaker, the prospective applicant may wish to seek clarity on this matter. The Board's representatives stressed that the Board's remit relates to assessing the proposed development in terms of proper planning and sustainable development and advised the prospective applicant to ensure that all other matters, for example, land ownership, rights to lay cables etc would not become a legal issue that could impede the processing of the application. It should ensure that it has sufficient legal interest to make the application and also to be in a position to carry out the development, should planning permission be granted. This would be a key consideration for the Board.

Presentation of the Application

With regard to the presentation of the application, the prospective applicant stated that wind farm sites located close together are likely to be grouped in order to carry out relevant assessments and for ease of presentation. It is likely that many sites will straddle county boundaries and it considers that it would not be of benefit to present the application on a county by county basis e.g. in assessing visual impact. It is therefore intended to group the sites into clusters in order that cumulative assessment can be carried out. Consultations with local authorities have taken place in this regard and they have been generally supportive of this approach. The prospective applicant notes that some topics are local and some will override the whole project and cumulative assessment is required at both local level and at a wider level e.g. assessment of traffic impact. There will be a non-technical summary of the environmental impact statement however, the prospective applicant is also considering including an executive summary of each volume/section. The prospective applicant has not made any firm decision, as of yet, on how it will present the application and will consider the matter further as the project progresses. In respect of the laying of cables, there are approx. 1,100 km of cable and it is



intended to present the assessment in two volumes. The Board's representatives consider that the cables form part of the overall project and therefore must be included in any application for the proposed development. The Board's representatives also consider that the principle of clustering is a sensible approach, rather than focusing on county boundaries.

Other Projects

The Board is aware of a second large scale project which involves the laying of cables to export energy to the UK and queried if both projects could potentially conflict with or prejudice one another. The prospective applicant stated that its approach in developing the project has been like any other land based proposal. While only certain parts of the coast are suitable for landfall points due to various constraints including water depths, road access, SPA/SAC and other environmental designations, it considers that there is still scope for a number of other landfall points for other projects.

The Board's representatives queried if it was possible to connect into the East-West Interconnector cable but the prospective applicant stated that there would be a capacity issue in this regard.

The prospective applicant confirmed that it has applied to become a Project of Common Interest but considers that it will make its application to the Board under the strategic infrastructure development process.

Consultations

With regard to consultations, the prospective applicant confirmed that it has had extensive consultations with the NPWS at various levels, including district conservation officers and local rangers. Similarly, consultations at national and local level have taken place with IFI. The prospective applicant confirmed that consultations have also taken place with the Irish Aviation Authority and Department of Defence. The Board's representatives advised that the prospective applicant should have regard to recently granted planning permissions in any housing surveys.

Construction of Turbines

The Board's representatives queried where the turbines will be constructed and if they or their various components may be imported. The prospective applicant cannot say at present, but its preference is that as much of the supply chain as possible be built in/come from Ireland. The prospective applicant stated that it has liaised with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the government in this regard.

Record Of Meeting

An Bord Pleanála



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Community Gain

In deciding to grant permission for the proposed development, the Board may attach conditions in respect of community gain. In noting that the prospective applicant is consulting with local communities with regard to the issue of community gain, the Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant that it would normally seek advice from the local authorities in relation to the matter and suggested that the prospective applicant also engage in consultations with each local authority in this regard, particularly to avoid any duplication.

Conclusion

The procedures relating to making an application for the proposed development will be addressed at a later meeting. The record of this meeting will be presented to the Strategic Infrastructure Division of the Board and the Board's representatives will arrange to meet with the Commission for Energy Regulation and the Department of Communication Energy and Natural Resources in respect of the project.

The Board's representatives noted that the project is still in a preliminary stage and left the onus with the prospective applicant to revert to the Board when the project had progressed further and when it considered it appropriate to arrange a further pre-application consultation meeting to update the Board on such progress.



Des Johnson
Director of Planning
26th March, 2013