



Bracklyn Wind Farm

Chapter 1: Introduction

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1.1 Introduction

This Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been prepared by Galetech Energy Services Limited (GES) on behalf of Bracklyn Wind Farm Limited ('the Applicant') to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out in respect of a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) planning application submitted direct to An Bord Pleanála pursuant to Section 37E of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) ('the Act').

The proposed development comprises a wind farm consisting of 9 no. turbines and all associated site development and ancillary works, including the construction of a 110 kilovolt (kV) 'loop-in/loop-out' electricity substation located in northeast County Westmeath and west County Meath; approximately 16km east of Mullingar, 4km south of Delvin and 5km north of Raharney¹.

1.1.1 What is Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

EIA is a process required by the European Union (EU) Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 2011/92/EU, as amended by 2014/52/EU, and transposed into Irish law by way of Part X of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended).

EIA is carried out by the relevant competent authority, in this case An Bord Pleanála, to ensure that projects, where the likelihood of significant effects on the environment cannot be excluded, are subject to a comprehensive and independent examination, analysis and evaluation of their likely significant effects on the environment; including the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, transboundary, short-term, medium-term and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects; of both their construction and operational phases, prior to being granted planning permission.

EIA is fully integrated into the SID planning application process and helps to ensure that decisions to grant or refuse planning permission for proposed developments are made in the full knowledge of their likely significant effects on the environment, including through consultation with the public concerned.

1.1.2 What is an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)?

An EIAR is a written statement prepared by the developer (in this case, the Applicant) of the likely significant effects, if any, which the proposed development, if carried out, will have on the environment. The EIAR consists of a systematic analysis of the proposed development, including its construction, operational and decommissioning phases, in relation to the existing environment. It is an iterative process carried out throughout the full lifecycle of the project design and consenting process so as to allow for preventative and ameliorative action, as necessary, at a point in time when changes can still be made to the project that anticipate, avoid and mitigate any likely significant effects foreseen.

The EIAR is the principal document that informs the EIA process and provides integral information which An Bord Pleanála can use; amongst other considerations, including, where appropriate, its own supplementary assessments; in independently

¹ For the purposes of this EIAR, the terms 'proposed development', 'development', 'project', 'proposed development site', 'site', 'wind farm' and 'wind farm development', and any variation thereof, are used interchangeably throughout and to encompass and refer to the entire project being assessed including wind turbines and associated secondary and off-site developments, such as the proposed grid connection, haul route upgrade works and all elements referred to in **Chapter 3**.

undertaking EIA and informing its decision to grant (including subject to conditions and/or modifications) or to refuse planning permission, and/or to seek further information from the Applicant.

The EIAR can also be used by third parties, including members of the public concerned, as part of the public participation process, to evaluate the proposed development and its likely significant environmental effects, and to inform any submissions made to the SID planning application process.

1.2 SID Status

SID is development which is of strategic national or regional importance where a planning application must be made directly to An Bord Pleanála in the first instance pursuant to Section 37E of the Act, and not to the local Planning Authority via Section 34, as would be the normal course.

Wind energy installations for the generation of electricity may be considered SID should the size of the project, either in terms of turbine numbers or electrical capacity, exceed the thresholds set out at the Seventh Schedule of the Act. The threshold for wind energy developments is more than 25 no. turbines or having a total output greater than 50 megawatts (MW). Prior to submitting a SID planning application, a proposed development must firstly be the subject of pre-application consultations with An Bord Pleanála pursuant to Section 37B of the Act to determine whether it constitutes SID, or not pursuant to the criteria set out in Section 37E.

At an early stage of the project design process, it became apparent that the total output of the proposed development was likely to exceed 50 megawatts (MW) and that the proposed development may be considered to be SID. Accordingly, the Applicant entered into pre-application consultations (Reference ABP-306261-19). An Bord Pleanála subsequently determined that, in accordance with the report of its Inspector, the proposed development constitutes SID and that an application for permission must be made directly to An Bord Pleanála in accordance with Section 37E of the Act. A copy of this determination is provided at **Annex 1.1 (Volume II)**.

1.3 Screening

The first stage of the EIA process involves deciding whether an EIA needs to be undertaken or not. This ensures that EIA is only undertaken for projects where the likelihood of significant effects on the environment cannot be excluded. In carrying out this screening exercise, and preparing this EIAR, the Applicant has had regard to *OPR Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening* June (2021) published by the Office of the Planning Regulator.

1.3.1 EIA Classes & Thresholds

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, EIA is mandatory when certain prescribed classes of projects exceed specific sizes and thresholds. Planning applications for such projects must be accompanied by an EIAR.

Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) ('the Regulations') provides that the following class of development proposal shall be subject to EIA:-

“Installations for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (wind farms) with more than 5 turbines or having a total output greater than 5 megawatts”

As the project consists of 9 no. wind turbines and an output in excess of 5MW, it is therefore of a scale which exceeds the mandatory threshold for EIA. Accordingly, this EIAR has been prepared and submitted with the planning application.

1.4 Content

In order to be relevant, complete and legally compliant, the content of this EIAR includes all of the information required by the EIA Directive and national legislation, as appropriate and necessary to the specific characteristics of the proposed development, and includes:-

- (a) A description of the project comprising information on the site, design, size and other relevant features of the project;
- (b) A description of the likely significant effects of the project on the environment;
- (c) A description of the features of the project and/or measures envisaged in order to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment;
- (d) A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the project on the environment;
- (e) A non-technical summary of the information referred to in points (a) to (d); and
- (f) Any additional information specified in Annex IV of the EIA Directive relevant to the specific characteristics of a particular project or type of project and to the environmental features likely to be affected.

1.5 Format

The EIAR is presented as 2 no. volumes, which should be read in conjunction with each other, as follows:-

- **Volume I** comprises the Main EIAR text and follows a 'grouped format' structure whereby each environmental factor is assessed and presented as a separate chapter. The EIA Directive prescribes the range of environmental factors which should be used to organise descriptions of the environment and likely significant environmental effects. These have been supplemented with additional environmental factors owing to the characteristics of the project under assessment, as follows:-
 - Chapter 1: Introduction;
 - Chapter 2: Assessment of Project Alternatives;
 - Chapter 3: Description of the Proposed Development;
 - Chapter 4: Population & Human Health;
 - Chapter 5: Biodiversity;
 - Chapter 6: Land & Soils;
 - Chapter 7: Water;
 - Chapter 8: Air Quality & Climate;
 - Chapter 9: Landscape;
 - Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage;
 - Chapter 11: Noise & Vibration;
 - Chapter 12: Shadow Flicker;
 - Chapter 13: Material Assets; and
 - Chapter 14: Interactions of the Foregoing.

- **Volume II** comprises a range of annexes, including technical data and reports, which informed the impact assessment provided in **Volume I** so as to ensure the EIAR is transparently supported by evidence.

A **Non-Technical Summary** of the EIAR is also provided as a separate standalone volume in order to facilitate the wider public concerned in their involvement in the statutory consultation process during the EIA and planning application determination stage.

1.6 Structure

In order to provide for a consistent approach and to communicate clear, concise, unambiguous information, each chapter of this EIAR is systematically organised so as to follow a similar basic structure, as follows:-

- The existing environment: A description of the context, character, significance and sensitivity of the receiving (baseline) environment using standard descriptive methods, in order to predict the likely significant effects of the proposed development;
- The likely significant impacts of the proposed development: The aspects of the construction, existence and operation of the proposed development that are likely to affect the existing environment including, as appropriate, predicted, potential, residual, 'do nothing' and 'worst case' effects. The likely significance of any effects is determined with reference to magnitude, intensity, integrity, duration and probability; and
- The measures to mitigate and monitor adverse effects: The range of methods which are proposed for mitigation by avoidance, reduction and remedy of any likely significant effects (including unplanned events) together with ongoing monitoring of the efficacy of mitigation measures.

This structure, which clearly separates data (descriptions of the receiving environment and of the project) from impact predictions (likely significant effects and mitigation measures), is designed to ensure that replicable impact assessments, based on rigorous scientific information and verifiable evidence, is carried out using recognised methods that are presented and documented in a fully legible, transparent and objective manner.

This methodological structure is designed to reduce any possible subjective information and bias in order to facilitate An Bord Pleanála in their independent EIA of the proposed development.

1.7 Guidance

A range of general statutory and non-statutory guidance documents were consulted in undertaking and preparing this EIAR, including *inter alia*:-

- *Draft Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports* (EPA, 2017);
- *Draft Advice Notes for preparing Environmental Impact Statements (Project Type 33)* (EPA, 2015);
- *Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DoEHLG, 2006);
- *Review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines – Preferred Draft Approach* (DoHPCLG, 2017);
- *Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DHPLG, 2019);
- *Best Practise Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry* (IWEA, 2012);

- *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland* (CIEEM, 2018);
- *Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into Environmental Impact Assessment* (European Commission; 2013); and,
- *Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment* (DoHPCLG, 2018);
- *Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment of Electricity Transmission Projects* (Eirgrid, various); and
- *Electricity Transmission Studies Evidence-Based Environmental Studies* (Eirgrid, various).

The above is a general and non-exhaustive list of EIAR-related guidance. Additional guidance documents, specific to each environmental topic, are referenced in each chapter of this EIAR, as relevant.

1.8 EIAR Project Team

The EIA Directive requires that an EIAR must be prepared by a team of competent, qualified experts with an appropriate combination of experience, expertise and knowledge related to the significance, complexity and range of effects that an EIAR needs to assess. Such competence includes an understanding of the legal context of the decision-making process and a variety of technical experts to address different environmental topics, and their interactions, in order to ensure that the information included in the EIAR is complete to a high level of objective quality.

1.8.1 Project Management

GES has been appointed by the Applicant to manage and co-ordinate the preparation of this EIAR. GES is an Irish multi-disciplinary renewable energy consultancy that specialises in the project management of planning, environmental and technical engineering services of wind energy developments from project feasibility through to delivery and operation. GES combines the expertise of leading experts in wind farm design, planning and environmental assessment and has extensive experience in managing and coordinating EIAR projects for wind energy and associated electricity grid and substation developments. Some examples of wind energy and ancillary EIAR projects managed by GES are provided in **Table 1.1** below.

Development	Development Description	Status
Carrickallen Wind Farm, Co. Cavan	Wind Farm comprising 10 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure.	Operational
Oldmill Wind Farm, Co. Monaghan	Wind Farm comprising 7 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure.	Operational
Taghart Wind Farm, Co. Cavan	Wind Farm comprising 7 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure.	Permitted
Taghart Wind Farm Grid Connection, Co. Cavan & Co. Meath	Approximately 12km of underground electricity line located predominately within the carriageway of the public road network.	Permitted
Cloghan Wind Farm, Co. Offaly	Wind Farm comprising 9 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure.	Permitted

Cloghan Wind Farm Grid Connection, Co. Offaly	Approximately 8km of underground electricity line located predominately within the carriageway of the public road network.	Permitted
Pinewoods Wind Farm, Co. Laois	Wind Farm comprising 11 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure	Permitted
Pinewoods Wind Farm Substation & Grid Connection	110kV electricity substation and ancillary electrical infrastructure and all associated site development works.	Proposed
Drumlins Park Wind Farm, Co. Monaghan	Wind Farm comprising 8 no. wind turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure.	Permitted
Drumlins Park Wind Farm Substation & Grid Connection, Co. Monaghan	110kV electricity substation and ancillary electrical infrastructure and all associated site development works.	Proposed

Table 1.1: Examples of EIAR Wind Energy Projects managed by GES

1.8.2 Environmental Specialists

The EIAR is also critically dependent on the technical expertise, experience, independence and objectivity of environmental specialists. They characterise the existing environment, evaluate its sensitivity and the likely significant effects of the proposed development.

An overview of the specialist experts involved in the preparation of each chapter of this EIAR, together with their relevant qualifications and key environmental factors covered, is provided in **Table 1.2** below. Some specialisms were provided in-house by GES expert staff while, in other cases, external specialists were appointed as expert consultants in order to undertake individual assessments and prepare specific chapters on environmental topics.

Each appointed specialist is a recognised expert in their field and was selected having regard to their knowledge of relevant environmental legislation; their experience and involvement in EIAR projects for wind energy developments; familiarity with pertinent standards and criteria for the evaluation and classification of significance of effects; the ability to interpret technical documents and to work with project designers to arrive at practical and reliable measures to avoid, mitigate and monitor likely significant effects; and to clearly and comprehensively present their findings in a concise and objective manner. A statement of competence for all of the specialist consultants who contributed to the preparation of this EIAR is provided in each individual chapter of this EIAR, as appropriate.

As part of its project management role, GES undertook overall editorial management of the EIAR to ensure consistency and cross-referencing between different chapters and volumes, and identifying likely interactions between separate environmental factors, together with general project management, briefing and steering of specialist consultants throughout the iterative EIAR and design process.

Ch.	Environmental Topic	Specialist Consultant	Personnel
1	Introduction	GES	Gavin Daly BA Dip MIPI
2	Assessment of Project Alternatives,	GES	

	including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Sites; • Alternative Technologies; and • Alternative Project Designs. 		Declan Owens <i>BSc MSc MIPI</i> Simon Carleton <i>BA MSc MIPI</i> Conor Foy <i>BSc MSc MIEMA CEnv</i>
3	Description of the Proposed Development , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wind Farm; • Turbine Component Haul Route; • Grid Connection; and • Construction Materials & Aggregates. 	GES	
4	Population & Human Health , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment; • Human Health (considered with reference to benchmark standards under other chapters such as noise, shadow flicker, air quality etc.); and • Amenity. 	GES	
5	Biodiversity , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitats • Birds • Bats • Non-volant mammals; and • Aquatic ecology 	Woodrow Sustainable Solutions	Will Woodrow <i>MSc MSc (Arch) CEcol MCIEM</i> Various Others <i>Various</i>
6	Land & Soils , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superficial Geology; • Bedrock Geology; • Geological Heritage & Designated Sites; and • Soil Contamination. 	Hydro-Environmental Services	Michael Gill <i>P. Geo., B.A.I., MSc, Dip. Geol., MIEI</i> David Broderick <i>BSc, H.Dip Env Eng, MSc</i>
7	Water , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local & Regional Hydrology; • Flood Risk; • Hydrogeology; • Ground/Surface physical characteristics; and • Drainage Management. 	Hydro-Environmental Services	Michael Gill <i>P. Geo., B.A.I., MSc, Dip. Geol., MIEI</i> David Broderick <i>BSc, H.Dip Env Eng, MSc</i>
8	Air Quality & Climate , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Quality; • Climate; • Dust; • Greenhouse gas emissions; and • Contribution of Proposed Development to binding targets. 	AWN Consulting	Niamh Nolan <i>BSocSci</i>
9	Landscape , including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape Character; • Views & Prospects • Landscape Impact; and • Visual Impact. 	Macro Works	Richard Barker <i>MLA MILI</i> Cian Doughan <i>BSLA</i>
		GES	Joseph Buckley <i>BSc MSc</i> Cormac McPhillips <i>BSc</i>
10	Cultural Heritage , including	Dermot Nelis	Dermot Nelis

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known archaeological monuments; • Areas of archaeological potential (including unknown archaeology); • Architectural heritage; and • Designations or sensitivities 	Archaeology	BA ArchOxon AIFA MIAI
11	Noise & Vibration , including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daytime Noise; • Night time Noise; • Vibration sources; and • Sensitive receptors. 	AWN Consulting	Mike Simms <i>BE MEngSc MIOA MIET</i>
		GES	Cormac McPhillips
12	Shadow Flicker , including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worst Case Effects; • Expected Effects; and • Mitigation Measures. 	GES	Cormac McPhillips Gavin Daly Declan Owens Simon Carleton
13	Material Assets , including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport & Access; • Aviation; • Telecommunications; and • Resources & Utility Infrastructure. 	Jennings O'Donovan & Partners	David Kiely <i>BEng MSc</i>
		GES	Gavin Daly Declan Owens Simon Carleton Conor Foy
14	Interaction of the Foregoing	GES	Gavin Daly Declan Owens Simon Carleton
Non-Technical Summary		GES	Gavin Daly Declan Owens Simon Carleton Conor Foy

Table 1.2: Specialist Consultants involved in the preparation of this EIAR

1.9 Scoping

The scoping process involves identifying the environmental factors that are likely to be significant during EIA and eliminates those that are not. The scoping process is highly interrelated with the consultation process as described in **Section 1.10** below. The prior determination of the nature and detail of the information to be contained in the EIAR is one of the most important stages of EIA and may be conducted through a formal or informal process. Scoping helps ensure that the EIAR remains focussed on factors that are environmentally based, likely to occur and may have likely significant and adverse effects.

In undertaking scoping, the statutory obligations as set out in Schedule 6 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) ('the Regulations') and a range of guidance documents were consulted, including those referenced in **Section 1.7**. A desktop analysis was undertaken of relevant data sources and precedents of EIAs carried out for similar developments, together with other relevant policy documents; such as the *Westmeath County Development Plan 2014–2020*, *Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027*, *Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019*, *Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027*; and all accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA). The scoping process also considered

relevant secondary and off-site developments not included within the planning application, including the existing Corduff-Mullingar 110kV overhead electricity line to which the proposed development will connect.

1.9.1 Scoping Report

As part of the scoping process, an initial 'Outline Scoping Report' was prepared to provide a high level overview of the project context; description of the baseline environment; alternatives considered; the proposed development; its possible likely significant environmental effects; and mitigation and monitoring measures. This report was used in the course of the consultation process, as described in **Section 1.10** below, to allow consultees to inform themselves of the scope of the project and possible environmental effects, and to invite comments on the information which should be included in the EIAR, so that a focused and robust EIAR is produced.

The scoping process also included an assessment of relevant 'secondary' or 'off-site' developments including:-

- The proposed connection to the national grid (in accordance with the judgement of the High Court in respect of *O'Grianna & Ors v An Bord Pleanála* ([2014] IEHC 632);
- Indirect impacts in respect of the extraction of aggregates and materials to be used in the construction phase;
- Transport and access considerations, including the haul route for turbine components and importation of construction materials; and
- The felling of existing forestry within the proposed development site and off-site replanting.

In addition to EIA, scoping for the potential for any significant effects on European nature conservation sites designated under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) was undertaken through the preparation of an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report. The Screening Report concluded that it could not be confirmed that, in the absence of avoidance or reduction measures, designated Natura 2000 conservation sites would not be adversely affected by the proposed development. As a result of this scoping process, it was determined that the project should be subject to a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and that a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) should be prepared and submitted with the planning application.

1.9.2 Formal Scoping

Section 37D(1) of Act provides for a discretionary provision whereby a prospective applicant during pre-application consultations with An Bord Pleanála may formally request an opinion on the scope and level of detail to be included in the EIAR. In this case, no formal scoping was considered necessary. In the course of pre-application consultations, An Bord Pleanála gave advice to the Applicant, both during consultations and through the published Inspector's Report, on the considerations related to the likely significant environmental effects which may have a bearing on its decision in relation to any subsequent SID planning application.

1.9.3 Informal Scoping

Informal scoping was carried out through ongoing iterative dialogue and feedback processes between the EIAR Project Team and the Applicant's project design team, and through the feedback received from the consultation process. Informal scoping was considered the most appropriate means of EIAR scoping in this case, as it was

envisaged from the outset that no environmental factors would be scoped out or eliminated from the EIAR. Accordingly, no formal scoping was considered necessary and all environmental factors, as prescribed in the transposing legislation, have been fully addressed and included in this EIAR, as described in **Section 1.5** above.

As an active, iterative process, scoping continued throughout the preparation of the EIAR, including during the impact assessment stage, and the EIAR Project Team maintained a flexible view of the scope throughout, by way of open, effective and ongoing communication, and consultation. The project design was dynamically informed and continually reviewed in light of environmental criteria and information emerging during the scoping process, and *vice versa*. This process resulted in the effective anticipation of any likely significant environmental effects and the consequent modification of the proposed development to avoid or reduce effects through redesign and identification of mitigation measures. This process has resulted in the assessment and consideration of a number of Reasonable Alternatives as described in **Chapter 2**.

1.10 Consultation

1.10.1 Pre-Application Consultations

As discussed in **Section 1.2** above, the proposed development was the subject of mandatory pre-application consultation with An Bord Pleanála. As prescribed by legislation, the purpose of the pre-application consultations was twofold. Firstly, to determine whether the proposed development constituted SID; and if so, secondly, to give advice to the Applicant on the procedures involved in making such an application and what considerations, related to proper planning and sustainable development or the likely significant environmental effects, in the opinion of An Bord Pleanála, may have a bearing decision in relation to any subsequent SID planning application.

A meeting was held between the Applicant and An Bord Pleanála on 14 May 2020. During this meeting, advice was given to the Applicant on the key environmental factors which would be relevant as part of the EIAR for any subsequent SID planning application. A copy of the meeting record was subsequently furnished to the Applicant (see **Annex 1.2, Volume II**) which listed the following pertinent environmental factors to be addressed in the EIAR:-

- Natural Heritage;
- Bats and birds;
- Planning Policy;
- Traffic and construction traffic routes;
- Residential amenities;
- Connection to the national electricity grid;
- Presence of peatland in surrounding landscape;
- Cultural Heritage;
- Visual impact on the surrounding landscape; and
- Ecological impacts, including potential effects on designated sites.

In issuing its determination that the proposed development constitutes SID, An Bord Pleanála advised the Applicant in relation to the planning application procedures and also provided a list of prescribed bodies, which were considered relevant and to be consulted by the Applicant (see **Annex 1.1, Volume II**). Each of these prescribed bodies have also been notified by the Applicant in relation to the planning application for the proposed development.

1.10.2 Planning Authority Consultations

As part of the pre-application consultation process, An Bord Pleanála identified Westmeath County Council and Meath County Council, as the applicable planning authorities for the proposed development site, as relevant prescribed bodies for the purposes of EIAR consultation.

A scoping request was issued to Westmeath County Council on 25 March 2020 and included the 'Outline Scoping Report' described in **Section 1.9.1** above, in order to provide the Planning Authority with sufficient information on the proposed development and its possible environmental effects. A response was received from (see **Annex 1.3, Volume II**), dated 13 July 2020; and referred to matters including statutory planning policy, environmental considerations, natural & built heritage, grid connection, reasonable alternatives, socio-economic effects and residential amenity.

Consultation meetings with Westmeath County Council (Planning Authority) were held (online) on 27 August 2020 and 27 January 2021. During the meetings, the project was described in detail together with the relevant environmental factors; including, *inter alia*, population & human health (proximity to residential dwellings), biodiversity, transport, flooding, and landscape and visual amenity; to be addressed in the EIAR. Other matters discussed during the meeting included the project's connection to the national electricity grid, cultural heritage and community consultation. The Planning Authority also requested that the Applicant have regard to a number of publications including the *County Heritage Plan 2018-2023*, *County Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020* and *County Peatlands Study 2005*. A written record of the meeting was subsequently provided to the Planning Authority and a copy of same is enclosed at **Annex 1.4 (Volume II)**.

The final project layout, as proposed in the accompanying planning application; which is the outcome of a comprehensive environmental constraints process which give rise to 'design, assess, re-design' process; was furnished to the Planning Authority on 9 April 2021 who were invited to provide comment on same.

A scoping request was also issued to Meath County Council on 25 March 2020 and, again, included the 'Outline Scoping Report' described in **Section 1.9.1**. Correspondence was received from Meath County Council dated 26 January 2021 advising that they had no comments to make at that time.

A series of separate consultation meetings were held (telephone discussions); dated 8 June 2020, 7 September 2020 and 11 January 2020; with Meath County Council (Planning Authority). During the discussions, the proposed development was described in detail including the ongoing evolution of the project design, and matters including residential amenity and flood risk were also discussed. The final project layout was also furnished to Meath County Council on 9 April 2021.

1.10.3 Stakeholder & Prescribed Body Consultations

A wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, including all bodies prescribed in the Regulations and those listed in An Bord Pleanála's pre-application consultation determination, were contacted in writing at early stage in the scoping process to gather their views on the EIAR scope and the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed development. The consultation process involved furnishing each organisation with the 'Outline Scoping Report' described in

Section 1.9.1 above, accompanied by a set of maps and drawings, and requesting written feedback.

Consultees were consulted on 2 no. separate occasions. Consultation requests were initially issued in March 2020 and, following revisions to the proposed site layout, a subsequent consultation request was issued in January 2021. Where a consultee did not respond to the second consultation request, it has been assumed that they have no further comments and their initial response is provided below.

Annex 1.5 (Volume II) provides a sample copy of the consultation letter issued to each organisation, while a copy of all responses received is enclosed at **Annex 1.6 (Volume II)**. **Table 1.3**, below, lists all organisations which have been consulted, details whether or not a response was received and provides a summary of the content contained therein. The specific prescribed bodies identified by An Bord Pleanála as relevant and to be consulted by the Applicant are also identified.

While the consultation undertaken to date has allowed for any identified concerns to be addressed within this EIAR; the statutory consultation process, to be commenced following submission of the SID planning application to An Bord Pleanála, will allow these organisations to make any further comments, as necessary.

1.10.4 Community Consultation & Participation

1.10.4.1 Non-Statutory Consultation

Consultation is a key element of each stage of the EIA process and there are procedures for statutory public consultation at various stages in the EIA process. While it is not obligatory during the scoping and preparation of an EIAR, the Applicant has undertaken extensive public consultation throughout the development design and EIAR process. In compliance with public health guidance, the Applicant sought to facilitate the majority of public consultation remotely which generally comprised written correspondence (via email) or telephone correspondence. A number of consultation clinics were also held, during a period of reduced public health restrictions, when individual members or families were afforded the opportunity to discuss the project directly with the project team. A full report on the public consultation process undertaken as part of this EIAR is presented at **Annex 1.7 (Volume II)**. This approach is now recommended as standard per the *Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2019*.

The public consultation process undertaken facilitated the early identification of potential concerns of the public concerned in respect of the proposed development and a more focused consideration of likely significant impacts, including the identification of design modifications and opportunities to incorporate mitigation measures into the design process.

1.10.4.2 Statutory Consultation

Once the SID planning application and EIAR is formally submitted for consideration; the Applicant, An Bord Pleanála, Westmeath County Council and Meath County Council will make arrangements for public access to and dissemination of the information contained in the EIAR in accordance with the procedures contained in the transposing legislation and as described in **Section 1.15** below.

Consultee	Requested in SID Determination	Response Received	Summary of Feedback
An Garda Síochána	-	No	-
An Taisce	Yes	No	-
Ballyboy Airfield	-	No	-
Bat Conservation Ireland	-	Yes	Recommends a suite of guidance documents to inform the assessment of effects on bats.
Birdwatch Ireland	-	No	-
Bord Gáis Energy	-	No	-
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland	-	Yes	Proposed development is not located close to any existing or planned transmission site.
BT Communications Ireland	-	No	-
Commission for Communications Regulation	-	No	-
Commission for Regulation of Utilities	-	No	-
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Yes	Yes	Felling Licence to be obtained should the proposed development require trees to be felled or removed.
Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Yes	No	-
Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (c/o Development Applications Unit)	Yes	Yes	Recommendations relating to ecological survey methods, habitats and species, watercourses, bats, invasive species, birds, cumulative impacts and Appropriate Assessment; and provides a list of recommended guidance documents
Department of Defence	-	Yes	Advice offered in relation to aviation warning lighting.
Department of Housing, Planning and Local	Yes	Yes	Department may not comment on development proposals.

Consultee	Requested in SID Determination	Response Received	Summary of Feedback
Government			
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Yes	Yes	Query should be addressed to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.
Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly	Yes	No	-
Eir Ltd	-	Yes	No transmission or radio service will be affected by the proposed development.
EirGrid	-	No	-
Environmental Protection Agency	Yes	No	-
ESB	-	Yes	No comments specifically related to the proposed development.
Fáilte Ireland	Yes	Yes	Recommendation that Fáilte Ireland's <i>Guidelines for the treatment of Tourism in an EIS</i> be taken into account.
Gas Networks Ireland	-	Yes	No comment.
Geological Survey of Ireland	-	Yes	No specific comments. Recommend that geo-hazards and groundwater features be considered in the EIAR.
Health and Safety Authority	Yes	No	-
Health Service Executive – Environmental Health Department	-	Yes	Recommendations regarding <i>inter alia</i> information to be contained within the EIAR, public consultation, noise, shadow flicker, geology, water, dust and cumulative impacts.
Iarnród Éireann	-	No	-
Imagine Group	-	No	-
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Yes	Yes	No specific comments. A range of recommendations are provided in relation to the design of infrastructural elements, the appropriate treatment of surface water run-off and the avoidance of pollution.

Consultee	Requested in SID Determination	Response Received	Summary of Feedback
Irish Aviation Authority	Yes	Yes	Requests that the Applicant engage with Mr. Bernard Cullen (Ballyboy Airfield). No specific comments other than the suggested imposition of planning conditions relating to warning lighting and the provision of as-built information to the Authority.
Irish Peatland Conservation Council	-	No	-
Irish Raptor Study Group	-	No	-
Irish Water	Yes	Yes	General comments relating to the protection of water services and water quality.
Irish Wildlife Trust	-	No	-
Meath County Council	Yes	Yes	No comments to make.
Mosaic Net	-	No	-
National Ambulance Service	-	No	-
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	-	No	-
National Parks & Wildlife Service	-	Yes	See Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
National Trails Office	-	No	-
Netshare Ireland	-	No	-
Office of Public Works	-	No	No significant effect on any OPW properties predicted.
Open Eir	-	Yes	No impact on Eircom Limited radio network.
Ripplecom	-	Yes	The proposed development will not impact the network.
2rn (RTE Transmission Network Ltd)	-	Yes	Risk of localised interference and request that an interference remediation protocol be put in place.
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	-	No	-

Consultee	Requested in SID Determination	Response Received	Summary of Feedback
Tetra Ireland Communications Ltd	-	Yes	No impact anticipated.
The Arts Council	-	No	-
The Heritage Council	Yes	No	-
Three (3) Ireland	-	No	-
Towercom	-	No	-
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Yes	Yes	Provides general guidance for impact assessment.
Údarás na Gaeltachta	-	No	-
Virgin Media Ireland	-	Yes	No links are likely to be affected.
Vodafone Ireland Ltd	-	No	-
Waterways Ireland	-	No	-
Westmeath County Council	Yes	Yes	Comments made in relation to planning policy, environmental considerations, natural & built heritage, grid connection, assessment of reasonable alternatives, socio-economic matters and residential amenity.

Table 1.3: Summary of Written Consultations

1.11 Cumulative Impact

This EIAR has considered the likelihood of the proposed development, in its totality including secondary and off-site developments, acting in combination with other existing, permitted and proposed developments in the wider vicinity of the proposed development site, to result in likely effects on the environment which, when combined, may result in impacts which are cumulatively significant.

In the first instance, a desktop review of available data sources (satellite imagery) was undertaken to identify existing developments in the local area. Secondly, the EIA Portal² was consulted to assess for the presence of proximate developments which have been subject to EIA. Finally, the respective online ePlan portals for Westmeath County Council³ and Meath County Council⁴ were examined to assess for extant planning permissions which had not yet been commenced. Developments warranting a cumulative impact assessment range from one-off rural dwellings to large scale intensive poultry rearing units and quarrying activities. **Table 1.4**, below, provides a list of developments which have been considered in the cumulative impact assessment of this EIAR.

Development	Planning Register Reference	Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) or Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) License	Development Description
Ballivor Wind Farm ⁵	PC17.307471	-	Proposed wind energy development of 26 no. wind turbines ⁶
Peat Extraction	An Bord Pleanála ABP-307278-20	P0501-01	The development consists of peat extraction carried out by Bord na Móna since 2012, including the provision and maintenance of drainage and silt ponds, temporary peat stock piles and temporary rail lines, the provision of hard standing and car parking areas, buildings, offices, bunded diesel tanks, fenced storage areas, gates and other associated works.
Aeromodellers Airstrip	Westmeath County Council 12/2067	-	Laying two intersecting grass strips or use as a take-off and landing area for model aircraft.
Bord na Móna	Westmeath	-	Construction of a 10/20kV ESB

² <http://housingaovie.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d7d5a3d48f104ecbb206e7e5f84b71f1>

³ <http://www.eplanning.ie/westmeathCC/searchtypes>

⁴ <http://www.eplanning.ie/meathCC/searchtypes>

⁵ This proposed development is currently in pre-application consultation stage with An Bord Pleanála pursuant to Section 37B of the Act and may be subject to change. The Applicant has engaged with the prospective applicant of the proposed Ballivor Wind Farm and continues to facilitate ongoing engagement.

⁶ While we are aware of this proposed development, a planning application for same has not yet been progressed. As such, an exact description of the proposed development cannot be confirmed; however, this description is taken from the project-specific [website](#). It should be noted, therefore, that the layout, number and dimensions of wind turbines may change while further revisions to the layout of this development may also occur.

Horticulture Electricity Substation & Storage Facilities	County Council 90/554 & 05/2348		substation to serve the Ballivor horticulture factory.
Shay Murtagh Concrete	Westmeath County Council 82/30 and others	-	Quarrying Activities
Pig Rearing Units	Westmeath County Council 06/5492, 09/5022 and 11/2091,	-	Various
Pig Rearing Unit	Westmeath County Council 18/6221	P0713-03	Construction of a new 2400sqm. pig building with associated site works required to comply with animal welfare regulations.
Poultry Unit	Meath County Council TA190652	-	Construction of a free range poultry house and a detached manure/general purpose storage shed.
Poultry Units	Westmeath County Council 99/249, 05/5321 & 11/2049	-	Construction of poultry rearing houses.
Pig Rearing Unit	Westmeath County Council 09/2025	-	Permission for a pig rearing unit to accommodate 744 sows, facilities to rear weaners to 30kgs, staff facilities, installation of a proprietary waste water treatment system, percolation area, the carrying out of all ancillary site development works.
Construction of Site Entrance	Westmeath County Council 18/6246	-	Upgrade of an existing entrance to forestry harvesting standard onto public road to facilitate access to factory plantation together with internal access road and all associated site works.
Agricultural Developments	Various	-	Various.
Residential Dwellings	Various	-	Various.

Table 1.4: Developments addressed in cumulative impact assessment

1.12 Impact Assessment

This EIAR focuses on describing environmental effects that are both likely and significant by reference to the individual environmental factors described in **Section 1.5** and their sensitivities. In order to provide for clarity of method, language and

meaning, and to accurately explain the full range of effects, the impact classification and sensitivity terminology described in the *Draft Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA, 2017)* is used in this EIAR to ensure that all likely significant effects are adequately considered and clearly and transparently communicated.

Within this EIAR, a distinction is drawn between 'impacts' and 'effects'. In accordance with the *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (CIEEM, 2018)*, an 'impact' is an action resulting in changes to the environment (for example, the construction activities of a development removing a hedgerow). An 'effect' is the outcome on the environment from an 'impact' (for example, the effects on a dormouse population from loss of a hedgerow). The effect arising from an impact may, or may not, be likely to be significant⁷.

Significance is a concept related to the weight that should be attached to effects when decisions are made. A significant effect is an effect that is sufficiently important to require assessment and reporting so that the competent authority (An Bord Pleanála) is adequately informed of the environmental consequences of permitting a project.

Further specific guidance, legislation and technical standards for describing environmental effects, and pertinent to particular environmental topics, are also described in each individual chapter of this EIAR, as necessary.

Magnitude	Sensitivity of Receptor				
	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Very High	Profound	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Moderate	Slight
High	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Substantial - moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight-imperceptible
Medium	Substantial	Substantial - moderate	Moderate	Slight	Imperceptible
Low	Moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible
Negligible	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible

Table 1.5: Impact Significance Matrix

Source: *Draft Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA, 2017)*

- * Categories with dark grey shading are considered to equate with 'significant' impacts/effects
- ** The significance matrix provides an indicative framework from which the significance of impact is derived.

⁷ As the purpose of this EIAR is to provide a report of the effects, if any, which proposed development would have on the environment, the term 'effects' is used generally throughout this EIAR.

1.13 Mitigation & Monitoring Measures

Each chapter of the EIAR includes a description of the measures proposed to avoid, prevent, reduce or offset, as appropriate, any likely significant effects on the environment together with any proposed monitoring measures in respect of both construction and operational phases. Many mitigation measures have already been incorporated into the project design at an early stage, through the iterative scoping and impact assessment processes, to avoid any likely significant environmental effects i.e. 'mitigation by design'. Monitoring measures have also been proposed, where appropriate, to demonstrate compliance with, and efficacy of, the mitigation measures proposed.

In order to ensure clarity of the mitigation and monitoring measures proposed, and as requested by An Bord Pleanála during pre-application consultations, all such measures are included in a compendium as a separate annex to this EIAR (see **Annex 1.8, Volume II**).

1.14 Non-Technical Summary

A short and accessible non-technical summary has also been prepared as a separate and self-contained document which can be distributed to the public concerned and who may be likely to be affected by the proposed development.

The non-technical summary is laid out in a similar, but condensed, format to the main EIAR, i.e. describing the project, existing environment, effects and mitigation and monitoring measures, but presented in a manner that avoids technical language, such that it is easily understandable and accessible to a layperson.

The purpose of the non-technical summary is to transparently facilitate the full public access and participation of the public concerned in the statutory consultation process following the submission of the SID planning application to An Bord Pleanála.

1.15 Public Access

Public access and participation is a core feature of the EIA process. Compliance with the Aarhus Convention and the EIA Directive requires that arrangements for public access facilitate the convenient dissemination of the information contained in the EIAR in a timely and fully transparent manner. The core objective is to ensure that the public is made as fully aware as possible, and at the earliest possible stage, of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed development prior to a decision being made by An Bord Pleanála.

Prior to the submission of the SID planning application, public newspaper notices will be published and site notices erected in accordance with the legislative requirements and any further directions provided by An Bord Pleanála. Full information will also be made available on how the public concerned can access the SID planning application documentation and this EIAR, and involve themselves in the decision-making process, including through making written submissions.

An Bord Pleanála and the Planning Authorities (Westmeath County Council and Meath County Council) will also make arrangements for public access and dissemination of this EIAR and other SID planning application documentation in accordance with the procedures contained in the legislation. This will include making all documents available to view and purchase at the offices of An Bord Pleanála (64 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, D01 V902); Westmeath County Council

(Áras An Chontae, Mount St, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath); and Meath County Council (Buvinda House, Dublin Road, Navan, County Meath, C15 Y291). URL hyperlinks to all documents will also be available on the website of An Bord Pleanála.

A centralised EIA Portal⁸, managed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is a publicly accessible map-based database which provides users with access to all applications for development consent which have been accompanied by an EIAR since 16 May 2017. Following the submission of the planning application to An Bord Pleanála, the public concerned will also be able to access this EIAR via the EIA portal website. The EIAR shall be submitted in a format searchable by electronic means, in so far as practicable.

Finally, the Applicant is also required to provide a dedicated standalone website containing all of the SID planning application documentation and this EIAR. The address of this website (www.bracklynwindfarmplanning.ie) will be included in the public notices described above.

1.16 Habitats Directive – Appropriate Assessment

1.16.1 Appropriate Assessment Screening (Stage 1)

As a separate but interrelated process, screening for the likelihood of any significant effects on European nature conservation sites (Natura 2000) designated under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) was also undertaken through the preparation of what is known as an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report (Stage 1). This is formally a separate assessment process, with discrete reporting requirements, but is obviously highly interrelated with EIA.

The AA Screening Report assesses whether the preparation and submission of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) to inform an AA (Stage 2), also to be undertaken by An Bord Pleanála as the competent authority, is required.

The AA Screening Report prepared on behalf of the Applicant concluded that it could not be confirmed, in the absence of avoidance or reduction (mitigation/protective) measures, that designated conservation sites would not be adversely affected by the direct and indirect effects of the proposed development, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, having regard to their conservation objectives.

As a result, and in accordance with the precautionary principle, it was concluded that the proposed development should proceed to be subject to a Stage 2 AA and that a NIS should be prepared and submitted with the planning application alongside this EIAR.

1.16.2 Natura Impact Statement (Stage 2)

The NIS is presented and submitted as a separate standalone document and accompanies the SID planning application. The NIS includes both the Stage 1 Screening Report and the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. The NIS concludes that the proposed development will not, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site either directly or indirectly.

The Biodiversity chapter of this EIAR (**Chapter 5**) does not repeat the detailed assessment included in the NIS but cross refers to the findings of this separate assessment, as necessary. This is as per EPA draft Guidance (2017) which states “a

⁸ [EIA Portal](#)

biodiversity section of an EIA, should not repeat the detailed assessment of potential effects on European sites contained in a Natura Impact Statement” but should “incorporate their key findings as available and appropriate”.

1.17 Limitations and Difficulties Encountered in Compiling the EIA

No general difficulties or limitations, including technical deficiencies or lack of knowledge, were encountered in compiling the information required to be provided in this EIA. Where specific difficulties or limitations were encountered in relation to specific environmental factors, they are reported in the individual chapters of this EIA, as appropriate.

1.18 Note on Quotations

It is important to acknowledge that statutory EIA requirements call for a comprehensive description of the existing environment as well as all likely impacts and significant effects. The EIA therefore necessarily contains statements describing the positive and negative aspects of a proposed development. Selective quotation, out of context, may not be representative of the overall findings of the EIA and, therefore, any quotations should always be provided in their proper context.

