

An Bord Pleanála



## Board Direction

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**Ref: 26.PC0078**

The submissions on this file and the Inspector's report were considered at a Board meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009.

The Board decided, generally in accordance with the Inspector's recommendation, that the proposed development is strategic infrastructure.

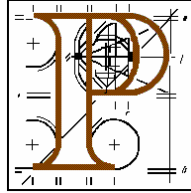
Board Member:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Brian Hunt**

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2009.

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# An Bord Pleanála



## Inspector's Report

**Appeal Reference No:** 26.PC0078

**Proposed Development:** Combined Cycle Gas Turbine power plant with an electrical export capacity of 400-450 MW

**Location:** Great Island Generating Station, Great Island, Co. Wexford

**Prospective Applicant:** Endesa Ireland Limited

**Planning Authority:** Wexford County Council

**Nature of development:** Seventh Schedule

**Date of Site Inspection:** 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009

**Inspector:** Mary Kennelly

## **Introduction**

The Board received a request on 21/05/09 from Endesa Ireland Ltd. for a pre-application consultation under S37A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, 2006. Three meetings have been held with the prospective applicants on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009 and on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2009, and records of each meeting are attached. A meeting was also held between An Bord Pleanála and the planning authority in whose area the site is situated, Wexford County Council, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009, and a record of consultation is attached.

## **The site**

The site is located to the west of the R733, which leads southwards from New Ross to Ballyhack and Arthurstown, and eventually to Hook Head. It is situated on the eastern banks of both the Barrow River and the River Suir, which meet immediately adjacent to the site. Waterford City and Port are located to the west. The village of Campile is located to the east of the site, which is on the Campile River, which enters the estuary to the south of the site. It is a very scenic area with many tourist attractions nearby including Dunbrody Abbey (to east), Cheekpoint Village, (together with scenic routes) and Passage East to the south/opposite side of the river, Ballyhack and Arthurstown to the south (same side of river) and Kennedy Arboretum (to east). The closest settlement is Newtown, which is a small cluster of dwellings to the NE of the site.

The site is accessed by road from the north (Enniscorthy) by means of the N30 to New Ross and the N733 from New Ross to Campile and from there by a series of local roads. Access from Wexford is via the R733 (east) through Arthurstown. This road travels immediately adjacent to Dunbrody Abbey. Access from Waterford is either through New Ross or via the Passage East-Ballyhack ferry. The site is also accessible by sea as the sea going cargo ships bound for Waterford port pass the site. There is also a large jetty on the site which is used for unloading oil for the existing power plant. In addition, the mainline rail line to Rosslare passes the site to the north.

The site (74.5ha) is low-lying on the banks of the river and has been cut into the hillside. It is therefore quite sheltered and well screened from the north. However, it is highly visible from the south, south-west and east. The existing power generating station operates on Heavy Fuel Oil and has an electrical export capacity of 216 MW. This plant was constructed in two phases. Phase 1 involved the commissioning of two 60 MW units in 1967/68 and Phase 2 involved the commissioning of a 120 MW unit in 1972. There are three generators which are housed in a large building together with the associated boilers, cooling tanks etc. There are two chimney stacks on the site as well as a large administration building, water treatment works, waste water treatment works, various water and oil storage tanks on the lower level and a large tank farm for oil storage on the upper level. The operations on site are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control licensing regime, which was issued in 2005. It is stated in the submissions that the existing plant is currently at the end of its lifespan and will ultimately have to be decommissioned.

There are two compounds including sub stations and pylons within the enclosed area, but which are in the ownership and control of the ESB and are outside the site boundary. These are located to the north of the power plant structures. To the east of the power plant buildings is a semi-vacant area of flat ground which has some portacabins and smaller buildings. This area fronts onto the internal access road running alongside the river. The area to the north of this ground comprises a cliff which is densely planted with vegetation, and which accommodates the tank farm. This is the site of the proposed new power plant buildings. The area to the north east of the site of development is excluded from the site boundary and is the subject of an existing pre-application SID case (26.PC0006), which relates to an oil storage facility. The lands to the south/southeast of this site are not currently used but lie within the Endesa site. These lands are described as having been used as a repository for materials excavated from the site in the past. To the east of these lands is a large area of wetland alongside the Campile River which is forested/densely planted and is not generally accessible.

### **Policies/Designations**

The site is located in County Wexford but is proximate to and highly visible from large stretches of coastal scenic areas within County Waterford. This includes several sites of high amenity value such as Dunbrody Abbey, the Suir Estuary, Coastal scenic drives/routes, the scenic village of Cheekpoint and areas of scenic landscape designations. The site is also located within/adjacent to two cSACs. The River Barrow and River Nore SAC code 002162 and the Lower River Suir SAC 002137. These designated sites contain several Priority 1 sites/habitats/species. Alluvial wet woodlands, petrifying springs, salt meadows, intertidal sand and mudflats, etc. There are a number of Red Data Book species and the site is described as being of ornithological importance under the Birds Directive

### **The proposed development**

The proposed development seeks to construct a new Combined Cycle Gas Turbine (CCGT) power plant on the site of the existing Great Island power generating station. The proposed new power plant will generate approximately 430MW of electricity. It will operate on natural gas and will have a back up supply of distillate oil. The expected commissioning date is 2012. The electrical power generated would be exported from the power plant via the existing 220 kV substation on the adjoining site. It is intended that the new CCGT plant would be constructed in parallel with the existing units and the existing oil fired power plant would continue to operate until the new plant is operational. Thereafter, it is intended that the existing plant would be demolished and decommissioned. However, this phase of the development does not form part of the current proposals and will be the subject of a separate application. The proposed plant would operate primarily on natural gas supplied from the Bord Gais Networks Grid. The gas line would be the responsibility of Bord Gais and will be the subject of a separate application.

The main components of the CCGT include two turbines, one gas and one steam, the main generator and a heat recovery steam generator, an exhaust stack, a condenser, water storage tanks, water treatment plant, distillate oil tank farm and an administrative building. It is

intended that the gas turbine and the steam turbine would be arranged in a straight line with the common electrical generator between them. The hot combustion gases pass through the main turbine to generate electricity and on exiting, the hot exhaust gases are passed through the steam generator (HRSG) with any remaining hot gases emitted through the exhaust stack. The steam generated in the HRSG is passed through the steam turbine which converts the thermal energy to mechanical energy which is used to drive an electrical generator. The exhaust steam from the steam turbine is then condensed back to water by cooling it with sea water in a condenser. The condensed water is then passed back to the HRSG so that the process can start again. Water is currently abstracted from the River Suir estuary for cooling purposes and is returned to the estuary (under licence). It is proposed to continue using the same water intake, supply and outfall systems.

The height of the turbine halls and generator houses would be approx. 30m and 38m, respectively. The height of the main exhaust stack would be 66m (compared with 2 no. stacks, 138m high, at present). The volume of distillate oil to be stored on site would not exceed 11,000 cubic metres, which is required for the purposes of security of supply in the event of a disruption of gas supply. It is stated by the prospective applicant that the daily water requirement (processed water) would be reduced from approx. 20m<sup>3</sup> (currently) to approx. 7m<sup>3</sup> and that the use of cooling waters from the estuary would be reduced from approx. 50,000m<sup>3</sup> to approx. 20,000m<sup>3</sup>. It is estimated that there would be approx. 500 construction workers on site at any one time. The existing road network would be used for normal construction traffic but abnormal loads would be delivered to the site by barge, using the existing jetty on site. It is anticipated that the stretch of road leading to the site entrance would require road improvements.

The proposed development would be the subject of an EIS. It would also require a new IPCC licence and a new discharge licence and the prospective applicant has been in contact with the EPA and the local authority in respect of these matters. A licence is also required from the CER. It was noted during the pre-application consultations that capacity for 240 MW has been confirmed and that the prospective applicant is awaiting confirmation regarding the remaining 200 MW. An application has also been submitted to Bord Gais for a gas connection. The amount of distillate oil stored on the site (11,000m<sup>3</sup>) brings the site down to the lower tier SEVESO, established under the European Commission (Control of Major Accidental Hazards Involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2006. The prospective applicant has been in contact with the HSA in regard to this issue.

### **Strategic Infrastructure Development**

The Board is asked to decide if this is or is not Strategic Infrastructure Development as defined Section 37A of the Planning and Development Planning Act 2000 as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006. Strategic Infrastructure is defined in the Seventh Schedule of the 2006 Act and includes the following under the heading “Energy Infrastructure”

*A thermal power station or other combustion installation with a total energy output of 300 megawatts or more.*

Section 37A of the Planning and /Development Act, 2000, as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, 2006 requires that any development specified in the Seventh Schedule should be made to the Board if the proposed development falls within one or more of the following paragraphs:

- (a) the development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate;
- (b) the development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the National Spatial Strategy or in any regional planning guidelines in force in respect of the area or areas in which it would be situate;
- (c) the development would have significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.

### **The Prospective Applicants' Case for Strategic Infrastructure**

The Prospective applicants' case is set out primarily in the covering letter submitted with the request for a pre-application consultation with the Board. The case was made that the proposed development falls within paragraphs (a) and (b) of Section 37 (A) (2) as follows:

- (a) *The development would be of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate*

From a Regional perspective the construction of this power plant will bring direct and indirect employment to the regional area which will lead to a greater spread of opportunities for the local towns and villages. The construction of the gas pipeline which will be undertaken by Gas Link/ Bord Gais on behalf of Endesa will increase not only the Gas network in Ireland but more importantly to the regional area and by having this network available, could potentially lead to future developments in the area.

Electricity generation and supply in Ireland is a matter of strategic economic and social importance. Recent Government papers have highlighted national issues regarding security of supply, fuel diversity and competition within the electricity market. These issues have contributed significantly to increasing electricity prices and fuel poverty. The introduction of the Single Electricity Market has been specifically targeted at attracting new investment in more efficient plant by independent generation companies in order to introduce more competition into the electricity market. This investment will ultimately reduce energy costs and deliver benefits to individuals, businesses and the national economy.

One of the reasons for the high cost of electricity in the state is reliance on old, inefficient technology for power generation. Another reason before the SEM implementation, was the absence of a market structure able to attract new investment by independent generation companies. This development will generate electricity

using the highest efficiency technology currently available and will trade this electricity in the new Single Electricity Market, hence delivering against the strategic goals set by the government in the White Paper, *Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland – Energy Policy Framework 2007-2020*.

- (b) *The development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the National Spatial Strategy or in any regional planning guidelines in force in respect of the area or areas in which it would be situate*

The National Spatial Strategy makes specific reference to the need for investment in power generation plant. The proposed development would utilise the latest and most efficient gas fired power generation available whilst optimising the existing industrial site and using the existing services and 220kV switchyard.

The Government White Paper and National Development Plan both highlight the importance of the introduction of the new Single Electricity Market as a mechanism to introduce competition in electricity generation, drive investment in new more efficient plant, and ultimately reduce the cost of electricity. This development would operate within the new Single Electricity Market and would contribute significantly to its goals and objectives. The Eirgrid Strategy “Grid 25” has set out a future network including conventional generation locations in which Great Island represents part of the south east pattern.

### **Assessment**

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, to the stated purpose of the 2006 Act as set out in the long title of that Act and to the general description of strategic infrastructure development set out in section 37A(2) and as defined in section 2(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, it is considered that the proposed development consisting of a Combined Cycle Gas Turbine power plant generating 430MW of electricity would fall within paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 37A (2) of the 2006 Act, as follows:

- (a) the proposed development would be of strategic economic importance to the region and the state, providing a sustainable energy supply
- (b) the proposed development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy by improving the reliability of electricity supply through improvements to the national grids and investment in power generation plant by the provision of a power plant which utilises the best available and most efficient technology combined with the use of the existing industrial site, services and switchyard.

It is considered therefore that the proposed development constitutes strategic infrastructure development as defined in Section 37A (2) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, 2006.

## **Recommendation**

Having regard to the records of the pre-application consultations between An Bord Pleanála and the prospective applicant, I recommend that the Board should decide that:

1. The proposed development does constitute Strategic Infrastructure Development under the meaning of Section 37A of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 as it would fall within paragraphs 37A (2) (a) and (b) of the Act.
2. An EIS is required to be prepared under Schedule 5, Part 1, paragraph 2(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001.
3. The list of statutory consultees proposed at the final pre-application consultation meeting be confirmed and that the prospective applicant be advised accordingly.

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**Mary Kennelly**  
**Senior Planning Inspector**  
**29<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

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