North Connacht 110 kV Project

Planning Report

May 2022

EIRGRID

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Contents

Tables

Figures

Appendices

Appendix A: Strategic Infrastructure Development Determination of An Bord Pleanála

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Report Context

This report has been prepared to accompany an application for Statutory Approval made by EirGrid plc (hereinafter referred to as EirGrid) to An Bord Pleanála (ABP), in respect of planned North Connacht Project located in County Mayo and County Roscommon.

The proposed development has been designated by ABP as Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) following pre-application consultation between EirGrid and the SID Division of ABP undertaken in accordance with the provisions of Section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended – ABP Ref. VC16.309913. The written correspondence from ABP confirming the proposed development to be SID is enclosed as Appendix A of this Report.

As outlined in more detail in Section 2.1 below, the North Connacht 110 kV Project will create a new circuit in the electricity transmission network in the northwest of Ireland. The new circuit will enhance the network in the area and provide capacity to connect new demands for electricity to support economic growth in the area, and to connect new renewable generation to help with meeting our Climate Action Plan targets.

The structure of the SID Application documentation is set out below in Table 1.1. All documentation within Table 1.1 is also provided on the standalone website www.eirgridnorthconnacht.ie.

Table 1.1: Structure of SID Application Documentation

Item No.	Documentation Type	Document Name
1	Statutory Particulars	SID Application Form
2		Letters of Consent
3		Site Notice
4		Newspaper Notices
5		Schedule of Prescribed Bodies and Notification Schedule
6		Schedule of Drawings
7	Planning Drawings	Planning Drawings
8	Planning and Environment Documents	Planning Report (this document)
9		Planning and Environment Considerations Report (PECR)
10		Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

1.2 The Applicant for this SID Approval

EirGrid, as the state-owned independent Irish electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO) is the Applicant for the proposed North Connacht 110 kV project.

With the enactment and coming into force[1] of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 ('the 1999 Act'), the liberalisation of the electricity sector commenced. This liberalisation has been driven in large part by European directives – in particular Directives 96/92/EC[2], 2003/54/EC[3], and 2009/72/EC. The 1999 Act established the Commission of Electricity Regulation (now the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU)) as the independent regulator of the electricity industry in Ireland.

The liberalisation of the electricity industry has involved the separating of, or unbundling of, various functions which were once concentrated in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). The function of Transmission System Operator (TSO) has been conveyed to EirGrid plc[4] (EirGrid), whilst the function of Distribution System Operator has been conveyed to ESB Networks Limited (ESBNL). The Transmission System Owner (or the Transmission Asset Owner / TAO) is the ESB[5].

On 29 June 2006, the CER issued a TSO Licence to EirGrid pursuant to Section 14(1)(e) of the 1999 Act, as inserted by Regulation 32 of the European Communities S.I. No. 445/2000 (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2000 ('the 2000 Regulations'). Thus, from 1 July 2006, EirGrid has assumed the role of TSO. Regulation 8(1)(a) of S.I. No. 445/2000 provides that EirGrid, as TSO, has the exclusive function:

"To operate and ensure the maintenance of and, if necessary, develop a safe, secure, reliable, economical, and efficient electricity transmission system, and to explore and develop opportunities for interconnection of its system with other systems, in all cases with a view to ensuring that all reasonable demands for electricity are met having due regard for the environment."

EirGrid, as Irish Transmission System Operator (TSO) is responsible for a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity now and in the future. It develops, manages and operates Ireland's high voltage electricity grid (also called the "Transmission System"[6]). This brings power from where it is generated to where it is needed, throughout Ireland. The grid powers the distribution network owned by the Transmission Asset Owner (TAO) ESB. This supplies the electricity used every day in homes, businesses, schools, hospitals,

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[1] The Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 came into force in February 2000.
[2] The 1999 Act and the European (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2000; The European (Internal Market in Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002; The European (Internal Market in Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations, 2003 were amongst the measures enacted / passed to give effect to this directive
[3] The European (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2005, The European (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2006 and The European (Internal Market in Electricity) (Electricity Supply Board) Regulations, 2008 were amongst the measures enacted / passed to give effect to this directive.
[4] EirGrid is a public limited company established pursuant to Regulation 34 of the European Communities (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations 2000 (S.I. No. 445/2000) and the licensed Transmission System Operator for Ireland pursuant to Section 14 of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999.
[5] ESB is the licensed Transmission System Owner (TAO) for Ireland pursuant to Section 14 of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999
[6] The transmission network essentially refers to the higher voltage grid of 400 kV, 220 kV and 110 kV. The lower voltage distribution network is primarily developed as 38 kV, 20 kV or 10 kV infrastructure

and farms. EirGrid also uses the grid to supply power directly to industry and businesses that use large amounts of electricity.

EirGrid also owns SONI Limited (SONI), the System Operator of Northern Ireland. The Single Electricity Market Operator (SEMO) is the market operator of the all-island wholesale electricity trading system. SEMO is a joint venture between EirGrid and SONI.

It is in this capacity, and as the 'undertaker' referred to in Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that EirGrid is proposing to develop the North Connacht 110 kV project.

1.3 Purpose and Structure of this Report

The purpose of this planning report is to present the planning issues associated with the proposed development; this is intended to assist the Board in determining whether the proposed development is in accordance with principles of proper planning and sustainable development, and accordingly whether statutory Approval should be granted for the proposed development.

The structure of this planning report is as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: The Proposed Development
- Section 3: Planning Policy Context
- Section 4: Social and Community Engagement
- Section 5: Planning Appraisal
- Section 6: Conclusions
- Appendix A: (SID Pre-App. Determination)

1.4 Strategic Need for the Project

There is a significant amount of renewable generation in the North Connacht area that have agreements in place – outside the scope of this project - to connect to the transmission grid. Overall, a total generation capacity of 752 MW is connected, or anticipated to be connected, with Firm Access Quantities[7] (FAQ).

One of EirGrid's roles as TSO is to analyse the network issues which are caused by the planned connection of all such generation in North Connacht area. In summary, given that the total generated electricity in the North Connacht area significantly exceeds demand in the area, a significant amount of power has to be carried southwards and eastwards from the area on the transmission system.

However, the level of renewable generation in the region is far greater than the current carrying capacity of the local electricity network. In situations with relatively high wind generation (>80%), EirGrid studies

[7] The level of firm financial access available in the transmission network for a generator is that generator's Firm Access Quantity or 'FAQ'. Firm financial access means that if a generator is constrained on or off, it is eligible for compensation in the manner set out in the Trading & Settlement Code. See also http://www.eirgridgroup.com/customer-and-industry/general-customer-information/operational-constraints/

have identified overloads, or otherwise the unplanned loss of plant or equipment (known as an N-1 contingency) on the following existing transmission circuits or station equipment in the wider region:

- Glenree – Moy 110 kV;
- Castlebar – Cloon 110 kV;
- Bellacorick – Castlebar 110 kV;
- Cunghill – Glenree 110 kV;
- Cunghill – Sligo 110 kV;
- Cashla – Dalton 110 kV;
- Bellacorick – Moy 110 kV; and
- on Dalton 110 kV busbar;

In accordance with transmission standards, each item of plant or equipment is manufactured to operate within a statutory voltage range and to carry power flows up to a certain level. In a situation of the unplanned loss of plant or equipment, the power flow has to be redistributed. This could lead to a system voltage that is outside the statutory voltage range or to a power flow which exceeds the power carrying capability of plant or equipment. Both voltage violation and excess of power carrying capability are unacceptable for the security and reliability of the transmission network.

In North Connacht, the loss of any circuit on the Moy – Glenree - Cunghill – Sligo or the Bellacorick – Castlebar route would result in the excess of manufactured capability of plant or equipment. These violations are in breach of EirGrid's Transmission System Security and Planning Standards[8] (TSSPS).

There is therefore a strategic need for reinforcement of the transmission system in the North Connacht area to accommodate the anticipated renewable generation that will be connecting to the grid in the area.

The North Connacht 110 kV Project, an Underground Cable (UGC) connection between Moy Substation west of Ballina Co. Mayo, and Tonroe Substation in Ballaghaderreen Co. Roscommon, will ensure an ability for integration of the anticipated significant additional renewable generation onto the existing network. It will facilitate the transport of electricity across the region.

The North Connacht 110 kV project will also contribute to the government's objective of a low-carbon energy future. At present, as noted above, a large amount of renewable electricity is generated by wind farms in the North Connacht area with more planned over the coming years, both offshore and onshore.

This project also supports plans to boost business and investment in the region by ensuring security of supply for customers and providing the robust electricity infrastructure required by industry across the North Connacht area. In this regard, and as outlined elsewhere in this Report, while the project is currently being designed and developed to meet current anticipated requirements, there is an inherent future-proofing in progressing a UGC solution that can be designed to facilitate higher capacity transmission should this ever be required, for example by using higher capacity 110 kV conductors

[8] http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/EirGrid-Transmission-System-Security-and-Planning-Standards-TSSPS-Final-May-2016-APPROVED.pdf

(subject to future testing and availability of new cable technologies), or even by ultimate replacement of the 110 kV cables with 220 kV cables (subject to separate future planning and consenting).

1.5 Legislative Context

1.5.1 Planning and Development Act, 2000, as Amended

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, forms the basis for the Irish planning system setting out the detail of regional spatial and economic strategies, development plans and local area plans, as well as the basic framework of the development management and consent system.

Section 3(1) of the Act states that:

"Development in this Act means, except where the context otherwise requires, the carrying out of any works on, in, over or under land or the making of any material change in use of any structures or other land".

The Act has been amended at various times by various statutory instruments made pursuant to the Act and previous affecting provisions, including by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 (the 'SIA'), which streamlined the planning process for major infrastructure projects.

Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, as inserted by Section 4 of the SIA, states that, where a person (the "undertaker") intends to carry out a *"development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission"*, an application for approval of the development under section 182B shall be made to An Bord Pleanála.

Under Section 182A (9) '*transmission'* in relation to electricity shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, which states as follows:

"transmission", in relation to electricity, means the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system, that is to say, a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Board [Electricity Supply Board] may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system but shall include any interconnector owned by the Board [Electricity Supply Board]".

Section 182A(9) of the Act states that the term *'transmission'* shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, and for the purposes of section 182A, shall also be construed as meaning "*the transport of electricity by means of* –

(a) a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110 kilovolts or more, or
(b) an interconnector, whether ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not".

With regard to the above, the proposed North Connacht 110 kV project comprises development for the purposes of electricity transmission as defined in Section 182A (9) of the Act; the proposed development will, subject to Approval being Granted, form part of the transmission network.

1.5.2 Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as Amended

Article 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, states that, subject to the provisions of Article 9, the classes of development set out in Column 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations shall be exempted development. In this regard, Class 26 of Part 1 of Schedule 2 ordinarily provides for the following works to constitute exempted development:

"The carrying out by an undertaker authorised to provide an electricity service of development consisting of the laying underground of mains, pipes, cables or other apparatus for the purposes of the undertaking".

This might be considered to apply to the proposed UGC development. However, Article 9(1) of the Regulations places a number of restrictions on the generality of the provisions of Article 6, including that:

"Development to which article 6 relates shall not be exempted development for the purposes of the Act –

If the carrying out of such development would –

(viiB) comprise development in relation to which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is the competent authority in relation to appropriate assessment and the development would require an appropriate assessment because it would be likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of a European site"

As separately contained in this application for Approval, the Appropriate Assessment Screening of the proposed development indicated the need to proceed to a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and for a Natura Impact Statement to be prepared. As such, the proposed development, cannot constitute exempted development and an application for statutory consent is therefore required to be lodged with the relevant competent planning authority.

1.5.3 Strategic Infrastructure Development

Following pre-application consultation meetings with ABP, on 1st June 2021, 19th October 2021 and 30th March 2022, ABP determined that the proposed development is Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) within the meaning of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, and that any application for approval for the proposed development must therefore be made directly to ABP under Section 182A (1) of the Act. This is confirmed in the letter (dated 13th May 2022) from ABP included within Appendix A of this report.

1.5.3.1 Pre-Application Phase

SID pre-application meetings were held with An Bord Pleanála on the 1st June 2021, 19th October 2021 and 30th March 2022, where the proposed development was presented, and advice from ABP was

received. This is set out in the various records of the pre-application meetings available at **www.pleanala.ie**.

Meetings were held virtually with officials from Roscommon and Mayo County Councils. The dates of the meetings and details of the discussions held are summarised in Table 1.2.

The advice of ABP, Mayo County Council and Roscommon County Council has assisted EirGrid and its consultants in defining the scope, nature, location and extent of the proposed development.

Table 1.2 Pre-application meetings with local authorities

Local Authority	Type	Detail
Mayo County Council	Ongoing E-mail/Letter correspondence from 12 February 2021 Meeting held 2 March 2021 (virtual)_Roads Section Meeting held 6 December 2021 (virtual)	The proposed UGC follows the proposed N26 Bypass Potential impact of the proposed development on the future Ballina Bypass (N26) which, at the time of writing, was at route selection phase, i.e. the route is not known. Impact of the proposed development on the N26 realignment at Cloongullaun. Potential subsidence along sections of the N26 and proposed technical solution Detailed consultation was being undertaken between EirGrid and Mayo County Council and Roscommon County Council to understand engineering characteristics and subsidence of the existing road and future plans to maintain the road in line with existing traffic volumes. Through consultation, high level design criteria have been developed that will be further developed at detailed design stage, within the parameters assessed in this PECR. This includes a top-hat solution with a geotextile/geogrid solutions.
Roscommon County Council	E-mail/Letter correspondence 29 September 2021 Meeting held 18 January 2022 (virtual)	Discussions focused on the need for ongoing engagement with Roscommon County Council, TII and IFI in relation to the N5 and water crossings. Areas of soft ground encountered during works on the N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge road were also discussed.

2.0 The Proposed Development

2.1 Overview of the Proposed Development

The proposed development (the North Connacht 110 kV project) comprises approximately 59 kilometres of new 110 kilovolt (kV) underground cable (UGC) between the existing Moy Substation, Ballina Co. Mayo, and the existing Tonroe Substation, Ballaghaderreen Co. Roscommon. This includes extensions to both substations. Approximately 50 kilometres of the proposed UGC is located in County Mayo and approximately 9 kilometres is located in County Roscommon.

In summary, the proposed development comprises:

1. Installation of approximately 59 kilometres of 110 kV UGC connecting Moy 110 kV Substation in the townland of Gorteen in County Mayo, and Tonroe 110 kV Substation in the townland of Ballyoughter in County Roscommon. The UGC will incorporate the following

a) Communication links and fibre optic cables between both substations, running in the same trench as the UGC. This trench is indicatively identified within a red line application boundary; the specific siting of the trench within this boundary will be the subject of post-consent detailed design;
b) Joint bays, communication chambers and link boxes along the UGC alignment. For the purposes of planning design, these are identified approximately every 850m along the cable route. The final siting of these associated structures and works will be the subject of post-consent detailed design, which may require the repositioning/relocation of these structures and works from their identified positions; however, the development will occur within the area of the application as identified by a red line boundary, and they will not be sited at any location of greater environmental impact than has been assessed in the application particulars.
c) Temporary laydown areas, passing bays and water and utility crossings. The works will include five crossings (using HDD) of the River Moy Special Area of Conservation (SAC, site code. 002298);
d) Upgrading of existing access tracks where required to facilitate access to the UGC; and
e) Eight new access tracks to identified off-road joint bays.

2. Upgrade and extension to the existing Moy 110 kV substation to provide for additional electrical equipment and apparatus, similar to that existing. This will require the extension of the substation compound by approximately 0.16ha. Proposed additional electrical equipment and apparatus includes:-

a) A new 110kV bay; an air insulated shunt reactor comprising three reactors and four current transformers; insulators, instrument transformers, overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors and approximately 15m high lightning masts;
b) All ancillary site development works, including site preparation works, site clearance and levelling; hardstanding, internal access tracks and temporary construction compound; and

c) Underground cabling and earthgrid; palisade fencing (approximately 2.6m - 3.5m in height including anti-climb device) and gates; lighting poles and landscaping as required.

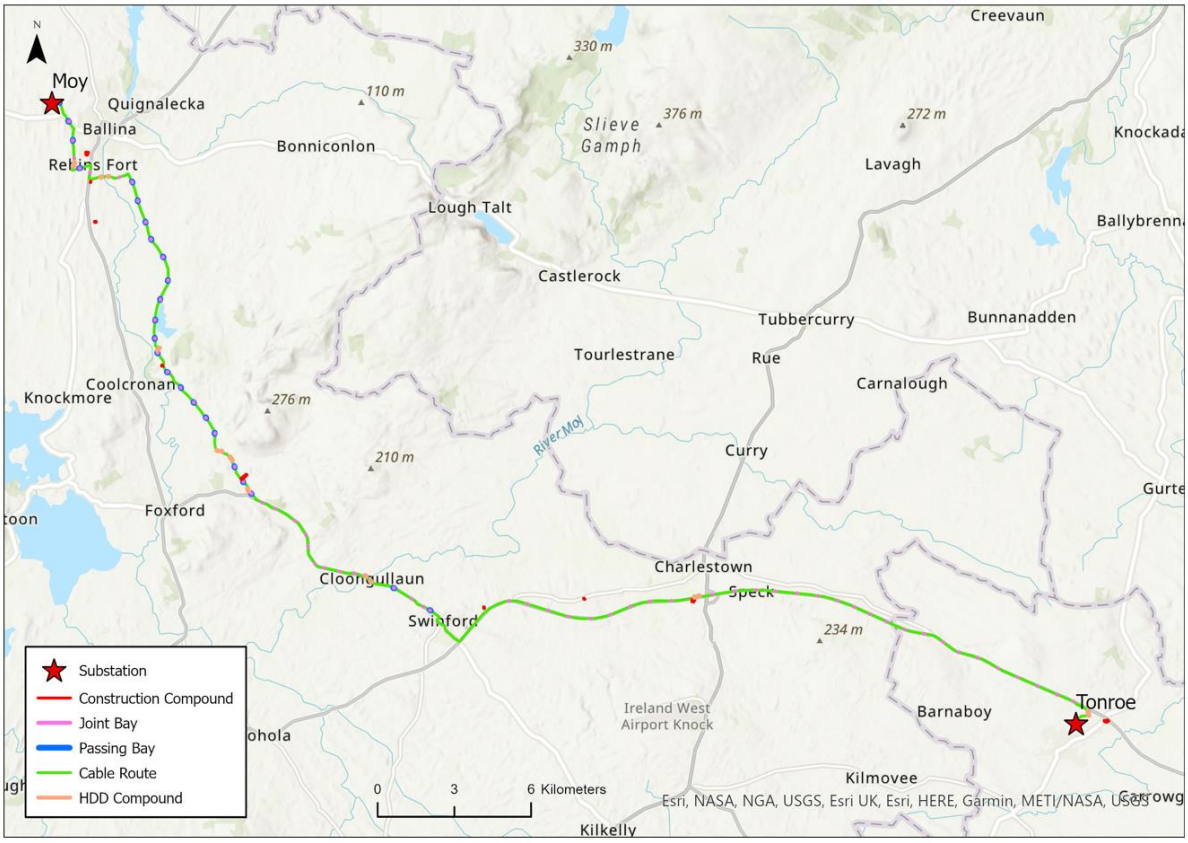
3. Upgrade and extension to the existing Tonroe 110 kV substation to provide for additional electrical equipment and apparatus, similar to the existing. This will require the extension of the substation compound by approximately 0.77ha. Proposed additional electrical equipment and apparatus includes:-

a) A shunt reactor comprising three reactors and four current transformers;
b) A communication and protection equipment control building (approximately 450m^2 and 8m high);
c) Associated 110 kV electrical equipment including, insulators, instrument transformers, overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors and approximately 15m high lightning masts; and
d) All ancillary site development works including site preparation works, site clearance and levelling; hardstanding, internal access tracks and temporary construction compound; underground cabling and earthgrid, surface water drainage network including attenuation tank; palisade (approximately 2.6m - 3.5m in height including anti-climb device) fencing and gates; lighting poles and landscaping as required to facilitate the development.

4. 11 no. temporary construction compounds of up to approximately 1ha located along the alignment of the UGC, including associated site works and ancillary staff facilities and parking.

5. All associated and ancillary above and below ground site development works, including works comprising or relating to permanent and temporary construction and roadworks and excavation (including HDD) and vegetation clearance.

Figure 2.1 The North Connacht 110kV Project



Source: Mott MacDonald

Further detail on the proposed development that this report refers to is provided in Section 5 Description of the Proposed Development and Section 6 Construction Phase Activities of the PECR.

2.2 Project Development

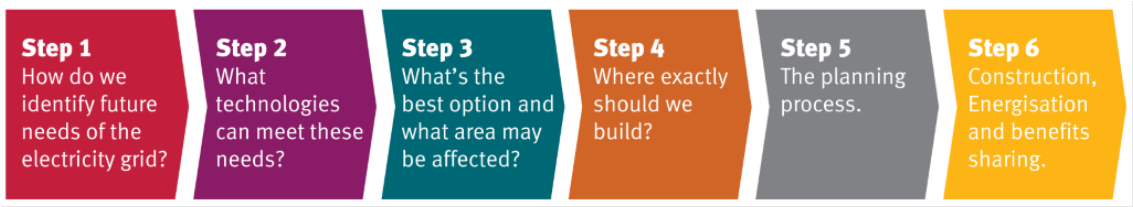
The North Connacht 110 kV project has been in development for some ten years; a significant portion of this time has involved investigating, and ultimately confirming the feasibility of the overall project.

Initially a project named Grid West was progressed in 2012 in response to an anticipated programme of large-scale renewable generation in the northwest of the country. However, in September 2017, EirGrid announced plans to replace Grid West with the planned development of a circuit of lower voltage, due to a subsequently forecasted significantly reduced scale of renewable generation in the North Connacht region.

The North Connacht 110 kV project was developed in accordance with EirGrid's six-step Framework for Grid Development, as summarised in Figure 2.2. The Framework ensures that project development

occurs in a consistent and structured manner, with adequate and appropriate opportunities for public and stakeholder participation in project decision-making.

Figure 2.2: EirGrid's Six-Step Framework for Grid Development



Source: EirGrid

The Framework approach, in summary, is that each "Step" concludes with outcomes (such as decisions, next steps etc.) that build upon each other. Deliverables within the Steps, such as reports, brochures etc., are available on the project website at **www.eirgridgroup.com**. Step 4 (Steps 4A, 4B and 4C[9]) reports are provided in Appendix 4.1 of the PECR.

In accordance with EirGrid's Framework, a comprehensive and consistent multi criteria analysis was applied to decision making at various stages of project development, including in considering a variety of alternatives. The multi criteria analysis facilitated a balanced consideration of the following criteria relating to project development:

- Environmental;
- Social;
- Technical;
- Deliverability; and
- Economic.

With particular regard to the identification of siting and routing options for the proposed development, EirGrid, together with its Consultants Mott MacDonald, have undertaken the various Steps of the Framework, with associated deliverables including:

Step 1, EirGrid identified the need for the North Connacht 110 kV Project.

- Step 2 *Options Report April 2018*, EirGrid compiled a shortlist of technical options, for public consultation between 2017 and 2018. This included a mix of overhead line (OHL), underground cable (UGC) and up-voltage technologies. Four of those options were taken forward to Step 3 in April 2019;

- Step 3: *Best Performing Options Report* January 2018, a further assessment of the Shortlist of Technology Options identified in Step 2, with the aim to establish at least one Technology Option that represents the best performing option(s). This report did not identify route options;

[9] Related Documents (eirgridgroup.com)

- Step 4A: *Corridor Options Report* September 2020, this report identifies and maps the constraints and potential areas of opportunity for the routing of the electricity cable connection between Moy and Tonroe substations. This report identifies three corridors for the routing of the UGC connection;

- Step 4B: *Development Options and Evaluation Report* March 2021, identifying the overall "Emerging Best Performing Option" (EBPO) for the proposed development. Of note, the Step 4B report the EBPO takes cognisance of the feedback received during the Step 4A public consultation. Of the respondents to the public consultation process, there was a strong preference for UGC corridor options with 87% of respondents supporting this. The deliverability of the EBPO is challenging from a social impact perspective as a result of its potential routing through various settlements;

- Step 4C *Development Options and Evaluation Report* EirGrid consulted further on the development of the route for the UGC option with local communities and landowners and published a Step 4C to conclude Step 4 and confirm the Best Performing Option (BPO) for the project to be taken into Step 5 (Planning).

In Step 5 of the Framework process, the BPO formed the focus for technical and environmental assessment. This culminated in a proposed development which is the subject of this application for statutory consent from the Strategic Infrastructure Division (SID) of An Bord Pleanála.

Details of the decisions and alternatives considered in Step 4 are provided in Section 4, Alternative Options Considered, of the PECR. Of particular note in this regard, during consultation and engagement with key stakeholders, in particular Mayo County Council, it was noted that the proposed provision of a 110 kV circuit will carry significantly less electricity than the previously planned 400 kV circuit of the Grid West project, and concern was expressed that this could constrain future economic development – including renewable generation – in the region over the coming decades.

It is the case that the scale and extent of the project will meet currently anticipated capacity requirements to accommodate transmission of renewable generation, and to provide robust, secure and reliable electricity supply to the region, which is a key enabler of job creation, and the attracting of economic investment. It is also the case that, should future capacity requirements increase beyond that currently anticipated, this can be facilitated by the proposed development, such as by the provision of high capacity 110 kV conductors/cables. In an even more extreme scenario, the UGC technology could potentially include the future replacement of 110 kV cables with 220 kV cables – subject to statutory consent requirements and processes. In summary, the proposed development offers the most flexible solution to meeting current and future needs of the North Connacht area in terms of provision of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure.

2.3 Relevant Planning History

A search of planning applications to Mayo County Council and Roscommon County Council was carried out every two weeks, and most recently on 05 May 2022. The search identified a number of non-EIA planning applications related to dwellings and farm buildings along the proposed cables route. Typically, these applications relate to extensions, demolition and construction of dwellings and installation of solar

panels on roofs. There were no identified Part 8 applications by either local authority noted within a 500m radius of the proposed development.

A search of current and decided Strategic Infrastructure Development, Strategic Housing Development and local authority applications to An Bord Pleanála was carried out on 05 May 2022. No relevant applications were identified within a radius of 1km of the proposed development.

A search of the EIA portal was carried out on 05 May 2022. No relevant applications were identified within a radius of 1km of the proposed development.

Table 2.1 and 2.2 present the planning history associated with both Moy and Tonroe substations.

Table 2.3 presents planned developments, from the past ten years, along the proposed new UGC route that are of a development type which may be or a scale, size or nature which may have overlapping impacts with the proposed development.

2.3.1 Moy Substation Planning History

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**1: Planning History in Respect of Moy Substation

Planning Authority	Reference Number	Applicant	Location	Description Of Development	Decision Made
Mayo County Council	311396	EIRGRID PLC	Townlands Of Bunnyconnellan East and Gorteen Co. Mayo	Uprate of the 110kv circuit between Glenree 110kv substation in the townland of Bunnyconnellan East, Co. Mayo and Moy 110kv substation in the townland of Gorteen Co. Mayo.	Is Not SID 11/11/2021
Mayo County Council	14444	EIRGRID PLC	Moy Substation Gorteen, Ballina	Refurbishment and upgrading at existing substation	Granted 27/11/2014
Mayo County Council	VC16.VC0076	EIRGRID PLC	Moy Substation, Gorteen, Ballina	SID pre-app: proposed refurbishment works to the existing Moy 110kv substation	05/08/2014 - Is Not SID
Mayo County Council	01/509	ESB	Moy Substation, Gorteen, Ballina	Install a 15 NVAR 110kv detuned capacitor bank and associated	Granted 14/05/2001

				equipment in the existing Moy 110kv substation	
Mayo County Council	99/2875	ESB	Moy Substation, Gorteen, Ballina	Install a 15 NVAR 110kv detuned capacitor bank with damping resistors, surge arrestors, busbar extension and bay equipment at the Moy 110kv susbstation	Granted 31/03/2000
Mayo County Council	98/1652	ESB	Moy Substation, Gorteen, Ballina	Erection of additional structures and equipment to include a switchgear building, two 38kv transformers, replacement 110kv transformer and associated equipment and structures all located within ESB existing Moy 110kv substations fenced compound	Granted 29/09/1998

2.3.2 Tonroe Substation Planning History

Table 2.2: Planning History in Respect of Tonroe Substation

Planning Authority	Reference Number	Applicant	Location	Description Of Development	Decision Made
Roscommon County Council	97/315	ESB	Tonroe Substation, townland of Ballyoughter, Bally	Erect transformer station with ancillary works	Granted 23/06/1997
Roscommon County Council	02/240	ESB	Townlands of Ballyoughter, Magheraboy and Toobracken	Alteration to the Flagford-Tonroe line. Proposed development is 1.05 km in length and consists of three overhead conducting	Granted 16/05/2002

				wires and two shieldwires	
Roscommon County Council	PD99/551 ABP-PL20.117054	ESB	Townlands of Ballyoughter	Development consisting of the erection of a 110kV overhead line linking the Flagford 220kV station with a proposed 110kV sub-station at Ballyoughter, Ballaghaderreen.	Granted 16/03/2000

2.3.3 Relevant Planned Developments

Table 2.2: Planning History in Respect of Relevant Developments

Planning Authority	Reference Number	Applicant	Location	Description of Development	Decision Made
Mayo County Council	15/45 PL16.245 415	EirGrid PLC	Bellacorick to Moy 110kV OHL	Uprate of the existing Bellacorick to Moy 110kv overhead line. Section of line to be uprated is approx. 27km long.	Granted 16/11/2015
Mayo County Council	19119	John Craven	Ardoughan, Ballina, Co Mayo	Construct 49 no. dwelling houses, consisting of 13 no. detached dwellings and 36 no. semi-detached dwellings, with connection to public sewer and public water main, including all ancillary site works/services	Granted 16/07/2019
Mayo County Council	16115	Molloy Concrete Ltd.	Bunnafinglas/ Drumscoba, Foxford, Co. Mayo	Extend existing manufacturing yard for storage of concrete products over an area of 1.84 hectares, construction of a machinery storage building, continuation of use of an existing aggregate washing	Granted 19/09/2016

				plant and all associated ancillary facilities/works	
Mayo County Council	21125	James Hunter	Coollagagh, Foxford	Filling of open quarry (lands) with inert material consisting of soil stone and concrete for the purpose of returning the site to agricultural use together with all ancillary site works	Granted 14/05/2021
An Bord Pleanála	JP0041	Mayo County Council	Pollsharvoge and Cloongullaun	Realignment of the N26 at Cloongullaun (in the Townlands of Pollsharvoge and Cloongullaun) This is currently under construction and the proposed development follows the alignment.	Approved 18/12/2018
Mayo County Council	18813	Big Red Barn Ltd.	Lagcurragh, Swinford, Co. Mayo	Extend existing warehouse and office space and upgrade existing effluent treatment facilities together with all ancillary site works and services	Granted 18/02/2019
Mayo County Council	21140	Cathal Kelly	Main Street, Swinford, Co Mayo	Alterations and extension to existing hotel comprising change of use of adjoining doctors surgery to hotel. works to include minor alterations to elevations, internal alterations including additional bar area at ground floor, additional bedrooms at first and second floors, new external beer garden to rear of premises and all associated site works	Granted 30/06/2021
Mayo County Council	17729	Stunat Care Limited	Deerpark, Kilbride, Swinford, Co. Mayo	Construct a 56 no. bedroomed nursing home consisting of 52 no. single bedrooms and 4 no. double bedrooms, quiet spaces, day rooms, kitchen, dining room, oratory, visitor	Granted 01/08/2018

				rooms, activities room, medical treatment room, family accommodation, sanitary accommodation, offices, storage and all other associated facilities (total floor area = 3,304.26 sqm) connect to services, carry out all associated ancillary site works	
May Mayo County Council	201025	Cignal Infrastructure Limited	Cuilmore Td., Swinford, Co. Mayo	Construct a 30 metre multi-user lattice tower telecommunications structure, carrying antenna and dishes enclosed within a 2.4 metre high palisade fence compound with associated ground equipment and associated site works including new access track	Granted 20/05/2021
Roscommon County Council	18300	Low Carbon Storage Ireland Ltd	Ballyoughter Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon	For the development of a grid system service facility within a total site area of up to 0.55 hectares, to include 1 no. single storey electrical substation building, 1 no. customer switchgear container, 15 no. electrical inverter/transformer station modules (SKIDS) 10 no. containerised battery storage modules on concrete support structures, 20 no. heating, ventilation and air conditioning units (HVAC units) access tracks and upgraded site entrance,	Granted 20/12/2018
Roscommon County Council	300493	Roscommon County Council	N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge Road	N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge Road Development and associated CPO. The scheme involves the construction of 34km road	Approved 16/01/2019

				upgrade to new Type 1 single carriageway; 15.4km of realignment of existing roads; five roundabouts; 16 'T' junctions; three road under bridges; one road overbridge; four river bridges and 14 culverts. Construction for the road improvements commenced in October 2021, with a programme of three years to completion.	

2.3.4 Similar Planning Applications using UGC

2.3.4.1 East West Interconnector (EWIC)

The East West Interconnector between Ireland and Wales (ABP Ref.PL17.VA0002) was Granted SID Approval subject to 17 Conditions by ABP in September 2009. EWIC bears many similarities to the North Connacht 110 kV project insofar as it primarily comprises an underground onshore cable (albeit High Voltage Direct Current – HVDC - cable rather than High Voltage Alternating Current – HVAC – cable as proposed in this instance). For EWIC this UGC runs primarily along public roads but passes through the urban settlement of Rush in County Dublin. The UGC route includes some off-road sections between Rush and Woodland in County Meath – the UGC extending over the jurisdiction of two Planning Authorities;

In Granting Approval, the Board concluded that:

"…the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of a European site, seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity of the proposed development or be prejudicial to public health or safety and would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience. The proposed development would, therefore, not have adverse significant effects on the environment and would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area".

2.3.4.2 Kilpaddoge to Knockanure 220kV Project, County Kerry

The Kilpaddoge to Knockanure 220kV UGC project concerns an approximately 21km long HVAC circuit between two existing 220kV substations in County Kerry. Insofar as this project concerns the civil construction of long lengths of HVAC UGC primarily along the public road, with associated joint bays, passing bays, communications chambers, temporary construction compounds etc., as well as tie-in works and structures within existing substations, it bears many similarities to the proposed development.

More specifically, the UGC element of the project involves:

- The laying of UGC in a trench of approximately 1.2m in depth and approximately 1.2m in width, primarily along the public road. This includes the built-up area of Moyvane Village, Co. Kerry; and,

- The development of numerous joint bays at intervals of approximately 600m – 800m.The joint bays measured approximately 6m by 2.5m by 2.5m in depth and these were surrounded by temporary passing bays, required to realise the joint bay works without requirement for lengthy road closures.

Having regard to the provisions contained in Class 26 and Class 16 of the Planning Regulations 2001 (as amended), Kerry County Council made a Statutory Declaration of Exempted Development in June 2015 in accordance with Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended - (Kerry County Council Reg. Ref. EX371).

The project is now in the final stages of construction. All ducts and joint bays are now laid in the public road and the road has been reinstated (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). Passing bays have been created and are either in operation where jointing of cable lengths in the public road is now ongoing or are in place for when such jointing occurs. Traffic management in the form of sensor-controlled traffic lights are in place at joint bay locations. Effectively, there is effectively no above ground visibility of the UGC project.

Figure 2.3 Reinstated road at joint bay (darker tarmac)

Source: EirGrid

Figure 2.4 Typical passing bay around a joint bay

Source: EirGrid

It is the case that this will comprise the same scenario for the construction of the UGC elements of the proposed development, such that there will arise a modest and temporary local impact arising from the proposed UGC development.

2.4 Conclusion

Due to the siting of the proposed development, in particular the routing of the UGC which is predominately in the public road or within verges which are unzoned, there is limited encroachment upon existing or zoned development sites detailed in either the Mayo or Roscommon County Development Plans. Where encroachment occurs, such as in Ballina, there is no impediment to the achievement of the land use zoning objective(s). A review of a number of planning application types, private development, local authority own development and by statutory undertakers has not identified any overlap with the proposed development.

The proposed development has a number of similarities to other significant electricity projects such as EWIC and the Kilpaddoge-Knockanure 220 kV UGC project in North Kerry. Both of these projects concern the construction and operation of underground electrical transmission infrastructure over long distances.

The Kilpaddoge to Knockanure UGC – of 21km in length - was Declared to constitute exempted development The EWIC project was Granted Approval, following the conclusion of ABP that it would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity of the proposed development, nor would be prejudicial to public health or safety, nor would have adverse significant effects on the environment, and that it would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

3.0 Planning Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

This section sets out the planning policy context for the proposed development as described in Section 2 of this report. This strategic planning appraisal identifies the key European, national, regional and local planning policies and objectives. It also includes those from a relevant sectoral perspective that are relevant to the proposed works and development, and demonstrates how the proposal will be consistent with, and contribute to, the achievement of same. Planned and permitted developments in proximity to the proposed development, and the planning history of existing structures, are also discussed.

3.2 European Policy Context

3.2.1 European Green New Deal, 2019

In December 2019, the European Commission (the Commission) published a Communication on a European Green Deal (EGD), setting out its increased ambition on climate action. It presents an initial roadmap of key policies and measures needed to achieve the ambition of becoming the first climate-neutral bloc in the world by 2050 This will require a transformation of the EU's economy, with sectors such as transport, buildings, agriculture, and energy production all having key roles to play.

As well as setting out the policy and legislative programme for all key economic sectors to deliver on the EU's climate ambition, the EGD also addresses the EU's overall ambition on climate targets. It proposes increasing the EU's emissions reduction targets for 2030 from 40% to at least 50% and towards 55% compared with 1990 levels. In December 2020, EU leaders agreed to reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

3.2.2 The Paris Agreement, 2015

Superseding the 2005 Kyoto Protocol, the 2015 Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), addresses greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, adaptation and finance starting in the year 2020, which aims to keep the global average temperature rise this century to below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

One of the key achievements of COP26 in Glasgow last year (2021), was the adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact which aims to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action and support. The Pact includes a package of decisions which consist of a range of agreed items, including strengthened efforts to build climate change resilience, curbing greenhouse gas emissions and providing the finance for both of these. For the first time, nations were also called on to phase down unabated coal power and subsidies for fossil fuels. The package of decisions in the Pact also included the finalisation of the 'Paris Agreement rulebook'. This set of rules lays out how countries are held accountable for delivering on their climate action promises and self-targets under their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Other elements of the Glasgow Climate Pact

3.2.3 Recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED II)

In 2014, the European Commissions 'A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030', established a framework for future European Union (EU) energy and climate policies and promoted a common understanding of how to develop those policies after 2020. The Commission proposed that the EU 2030 target for the share of renewable energy consumed in its Member States should be at least 27%.

The proposal was endorsed by the European Council which also advised that Member States should be able to set their own, more ambitious, national targets to deliver their planned contributions to the Union 2030 target and exceed them. Also, in 2014, the European Parliaments publication 'A 2030 framework for climate and energy policies' and 2016 publication 'The renewable energy progress report', went further than 'A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030', stressing that, in light of the Paris Agreement and the recent renewable technology cost reductions, it was desirable to be significantly more ambitious.

The ambition set out in the Paris Agreement, as well as technological developments including cost reductions for investments in renewable energy, led to new objectives being set in the recast Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001 (known as RED II).

RED II established a binding target of at least 32% of renewable energy for the EU by 2030. This target will be reviewed upwards in light of:

- substantial cost reductions in the production of renewable energy; and
- the EU's international commitments for decarbonisation, or where a significant decrease in energy consumption in the EU justifies such an increase.

Member States are required to establish their contribution to the achievement of that target as part of their integrated national energy and climate plans. Also, in RED II, the Commission encouraged investments in new, flexible and clean technologies. The Commission also established an adequate strategy to manage the retirement of technologies which do not contribute to the reduction of emissions or deliver sufficient flexibility, based on transparent criteria and reliable market price signals.

This Directive therefore has directly influenced the national policy context specifically relating to energy and renewable energy in Ireland, as outlined further in the National, Regional and County policy sub-sections of this report.

3.2.4 Europe 2030 Climate and Energy Framework

EU leaders agreed in October 2014 on new climate and energy objectives for 2030 following a proposal put forward by the European Commission. The 2030 framework aims to make the EU's economy and energy system more competitive, secure and sustainable. A centrepiece of the 2030 framework is the binding domestic target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. This will put the EU on the most cost-effective path towards its agreed objective of an 80-95% reduction by 2050. EU leaders also agreed on raising the share of renewable energy to at least 27%.

The proposed framework will bring multiple benefits: reduced dependency on imported energy, a lower bill for imported energy, greater innovation, economic growth and job creation, increased competitiveness and better health through reduced air pollution.

3.2.5 Energy Roadmap 2050

The Energy Roadmap 2050 was published by the European Commission in 2011 and explores the transition of the energy system in ways that would be compatible with the greenhouse gas reductions targets set out in the Renewable Energy Directive while also increasing competitiveness and security of supply. To achieve these goals, the Roadmap states that significant investments need to be made in new low-carbon technologies, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and grid infrastructure. Four main routes are identified to achieve a more sustainable, competitive and secure energy system in 2050:

- Energy efficiency;
- Renewable energy;
- Nuclear energy; and
- Carbon capture and storage.

The Roadmap combined these routes in different ways to create and analyse seven possible scenarios for 2050. The analysis found that decarbonising the energy system is technically and economically feasible. Each of the scenarios assumes in the analysis that increasing the share of renewable energy and using energy more efficiently are crucial, irrespective of the particular energy mix chosen. An important component of this energy mix is grid infrastructure, with the Roadmap stating:

"With electricity trade and renewables' penetration growing under almost any scenario up to 2050, and particularly in the high renewables scenario, adequate infrastructure at distribution, interconnection and long-distance transmission becomes a matter of urgency. By 2020 interconnection capacity needs to expand at least in line with current development plans. An overall increase of interconnection capacity by 40% up to 2020 will be needed, with further integration after this point."

The extension of current planning methods to a fully integrated network planning for transmission (onshore and offshore), distribution, storage and electricity highways for a potentially longer timeframe will be needed.

With more decentralised generation, smart grids, new network users (e.g. electric vehicles) and demand response, there is a greater need for a more integrated view on transmission, distribution and storage.

3.2.6 EU Commission Communication

On the 8th March 2022, the European Commission issued a communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, in which it highlighted the urgency and need for the EU to "*diversify* (energy) *supply, accelerate the roll out of green energy technologies and reduce our demand of energy*". The communication specifically notes that "*developments in energy markets in recent months, and especially the dramatic change in our security situation in recent weeks, require to drastically accelerate the clean energy transition*", with the need for greater security of supply "*adding a new impetus to the objectives of the European Green Deal*."

The communication includes a toolbox identifying a number of measures already being adopted by Member States to help mitigate the impact of high energy prices and sets out new actions aimed at ramping up the production of green energy, diversifying supplies and reducing demand, including enabling faster permitting. In this regard the communication also notes that "*The Commission calls on Member States to ensure that the planning, construction and operation of plants for the production of energy from renewable sources, their connection to the grid and the related grid itself are considered as being in the overriding public interest and in the interest of public safety and qualify for the most favourable procedure available in their planning and permitting procedures*."

3.3 National Planning Policy Context

Renewable energy is a national priority and government policy and is emphasised as such in the government's White Paper on Energy. This being said, renewable energy is dependent on the ability of networks and grids to allow its safe and stable use. Renewable energy, whilst a principal driver of energy infrastructure development, must be viewed side by side with grid and network system services which facilitate and support them.

3.3.1 National Planning Framework 2018 (Ireland 2040)

Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework (NPF), is a 20-year planning framework designed to guide public and private investment, to create and promote opportunities for Irish citizens, and to protect and enhance Ireland's built and natural environment.

The main aim of the NPF is to provide a strategy for the growing population and support future growth and success of Ireland's leading global city of scale and its regional cities and towns, while improving citizen's quality of life. The National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) relating to supporting and strengthening the economy and a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient society (NSO 3, 6 and 8), providing access to quality public services (NSO 4, 7 and 10) and achieving sustainable growth of settlements and management of environmental resources (NSO 1 and 9), are not achievable in the absence of a secure and reliable electricity supply.

The NPF states that Ireland's National Energy Policy is focused on three pillars:

- Sustainability
- Security of Supply
- Competitiveness

In line with these principles, the National Strategic Outcome 8 (Transition to Sustainable Energy), notes that in creating Ireland's future energy landscape, new energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary to enable a more distributed energy generation system which connects established and emerging energy sources, i.e. renewables, to the major sources of demand. To facilitate this, NPF acknowledges the need to:

'Reinforce the distribution and transmission network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of a more renewables focused source of energy across the major demand centres.'

National Policy Objective 55 (NPO 55) seeks to "Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050".

The proposed development will create a new circuit in the electricity transmission network in the North-West of Ireland. The new circuit will enhance the network in the area and provide capacity to connect new demands for electricity to support economic growth in the area, and to connect new renewable generation to help with meeting Climate Action Plan targets. The proposed North Connacht transmission system extension therefore supports the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF and will assist in optimising the performance of existing transmission infrastructure, facilitate the additional connection of renewable generation onto the national grid, particularly from the North Connacht region, and strengthen energy provision to the eastern seaboard, especially in the context of ensuring grid capacity to meet growing commercial demand. This will assist in delivering a secure and sustainable electricity system.

3.3.2 National Development Plan 2021-2030

The NPF is accompanied by the National Development Plan (NDP) which sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the implementation of the NPF, highlighting that "*Extensive efforts have been made to ensure that the NDP will support the Government's climate ambitions*", and in the context of the energy sector, the NDP also highlights that "*The long-term objective is to transition to a net-zero carbon, reliable, secure, flexible and resource-efficient energy services at the least possible cost for society by mid-century*."

In the above regard, the NDP reiterates the NPF centrality of NSO 8 (Transition to a Climate-Neutral and Climate-Resilient Society) to all elements of spatial policy and reducing fossil fuel use and commits to increasing the share of renewable electricity up to 80% by 2030, as well as investment in the electricity transmission and distribution grid to strengthen the reliability of electricity supplies.

The NDP identifies €9.5 billion being invested in additional carbon tax receipts, with approximately €5 billion of this being invested in energy efficiency, which is a strategic investment priority together with renewable energy, energy research and decarbonising energy.

The NDP highlights the fact that "*energy supply is vital for the proper functioning of society and the economy*", and that a national level priority is thus to ensure its continued supply within the overarching EU energy policy framework. The proposed development represents the type and nature of investment described within the NPD which is required to achieve the NPF's strategic outcomes and the continued safe and secure provision of energy.

3.3.3 National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030

The NECP is a ten-year plan mandated by the EU to each of its member states, in order for the EU to meet its overall greenhouse gas emissions targets. The plan establishes key measures to address the five dimensions of the EU Energy Union: decarbonisation, energy efficiency, energy security, internal energy markets and research, innovation and competitiveness.

The NECP takes into account energy and climate policies developed to date, the levels of demographic and economic growth identified in the NPF and includes all of the climate and energy measures set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with the NECP.

3.3.4 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development 2013 (Updated 2021)

The National Policy Position (NPP) on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development establishes the national objective of achieving a transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The NPP stresses the importance of harnessing energy potential and delivery of demand from Ireland's natural energy sources such as wind, wave and solar, new energy systems and transmission grid.

Irelands national policy position is to reduce GHG emissions in 2050 by 80% across energy generation, the built environment and transport with a goal of climate neutrality in agriculture and land-use sector.

The proposed North Connacht development is consistent with the NPP policy position and its energy transition objective, by ensuring that greater renewable energy generation can be facilitated on and across the national grid and through maximising existing transmission infrastructure to improve capacity, security and performance.

3.3.5 Government White Paper – Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030

The Government White Paper sets out a framework to guide Ireland's energy policy development. The White Paper acknowledges that an uninterrupted supply of energy is vital to the functioning of Irish society and economy, and the need for the 'development and renewal' of energy networks to meet economic and social goals.

Enhanced and extended energy infrastructure, such as the proposed development, will be critical for economic development, regional development and the secure provision of energy and other services for the proper functioning of the markets.

3.3.6 Climate Action Plan 2021 – Securing Our Future

Published in November 2021, the Climate Action Plan follows the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, which commits Ireland to a legally binding target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions no later than 2050, and a reduction of 51% by 2030. These targets are a key pillar of the Programme for Government.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 seeks a cut in electricity emissions of between 62%-81%. Among the most critical measures to achieve this, the plan calls for a phasing out of coal and peat-fired electricity generation and wind and solar energy will account for 80% of Ireland's energy supply by 2030. This will be crucial as we move away from fossil fuels and towards the electrification of transport, heat and other areas.

In the context of the proposed development, as greater volumes of intermittent renewable electricity are connected to the grid, new and extended grid infrastructure components and systems will be required in order to extend, reinforce and maximise existing transmission infrastructure capacity, maintain grid stability and increase the security and capacity of electricity flow across the country. The new circuit will enhance the network in the area and provide capacity to connect new demands for electricity to support economic growth, and to connect new renewable generation to help with meeting Climate Action Plan targets.

3.4 Regional Policy Context

3.4.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region (2020-2032)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region was adopted in January 2020. The principal statutory purpose of the RSES for the Northern and Western Region (NWR) is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan; the RSES sets out a 12-year strategic plan and investment framework to shape the future development of the region to 2032 and beyond.

The RSES outlines 'Five Growth Ambitions' as part of the region's delivery framework, which highlights the need for more strategic actions to prepare the region for future energy supply, the ability to use renewable energy, and the provision and maintenance of economic infrastructure such as energy, water and wastewater. To address the region's energy requirements, the RSES emphasises the need for coordination, new thinking, investment and skills to implement change.

The RSES recognises the success of the region in the provision of renewable energy. The significance of the potential for all new energy outputs connecting to the national electricity grid is also recognised, as are the challenges to same, including a fit for purpose transmission network.

The RSES identifies a number of proposed transmission development projects, highlighting the fact that they are considered regionally important and that "*The Assembly fully supports the delivery of these projects*" – the subject proposed North Connacht project is identified as one of these projects (Table 11). The RSES further specifically notes that "*Developing the grid will enable the transmission system to safely accommodate more diverse power flows from surplus regional generation and also to facilitate future growth in electricity demand. These developments will strengthen the network for all electricity users, and in doing so will improve the security and quality of supply. This is particularly important if the region is to attract high technology industries that depend on a reliable, high-quality, electricity supply*".

The RSES outlines a number of regional policy objectives (RPOs) to ensure that the development of the energy network is undertaken in a safe and secure way which meets projected demand levels, Government Policy and the need to achieve a long-term, sustainable and competitive energy future for Ireland. The following RPO's are considered relevant to the subject proposed development:

RPO 4.17: To position the region to avail of the emerging global market in renewable energy by: Stimulating the development and deployment of the most advantageous renewable energy systems. RPO 4.17 includes the following objective:

Encourage the development of the transmission and distribution grids to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects and the effective utilisation of the energy generated from renewable sources having regard to the future potential of the region over the lifetime of the Strategy and beyond.

RPO 4.18: To support the development of secure, reliable and safe supplies of renewable energy, to maximise their value, maintain the inward investment, support indigenous industry and create jobs.

RPO 4.19: To support the appropriate development of offshore wind energy production through the adequate provision of land-based infrastructure and services, in line with national policy and in a manner that is compatible with environmental, ecological and landscape considerations.

RPO 5.5: Ensure efficient and sustainable use of all our natural resources, including inland waterways, peatlands, and forests in a manner which ensures a healthy society a clean environment and there is no net contribution to biodiversity loss arising from development supported in this strategy. Conserve and protect designated areas and natural heritage areas. Conserve and protect European sites and their integrity.

RPO 5.7: Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the RSES are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.

RPO 8.1: The Assembly support the development of a safe, secure and reliable electricity network and the transition towards a low carbon economy centred on energy efficiency and the growth projects outlined and described in this strategy.

RPO 8.2: Support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission network with particular reference to the regionally important projects contained within Table 11 (of the RSES).

Table 11: Projects in Northern & Western Region

Project Name	Location
North Connacht Project	Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo
Regional Solution Project (series compensation on 400 kV network)	Galway
North South 400 kV Interconnector	Meath, Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh, Tyrone
Bellacorick – Castlebar 110 kV Line update	Mayo
North West Project (study area)	Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo
Bellacorick – Moy 110 kV Line update	Mayo
Cashla – Salthill 110 kV Line update	Galway
Galway 110 kV Station Redevelopment	Galway

Source: Northern & Western Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032

RPO 8.3: The Assembly supports the necessary integration of the transmission network requirements to allow linkages with renewable energy proposals at all levels to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner.

RPO 8.4: That reinforcements and new electricity transmission infrastructure are put in place and their provision is supported, to ensure the energy needs of future population and economic expansion within designated growth areas and across the region can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner and that capacity is available at local and regional scale to meet future needs. Ensure that development minimises impacts on designated areas.

RPO 8.6: Facilitate the delivery and expansion of natural gas infrastructure throughout the region and have regard to the location of existing gas infrastructure in assessing potential developments.

RPO 8.7: Encourage and support innovative partnerships extending the gas network in the region, including the potential for gas to grid injection facilities along with anaerobic digestion facilities.

The RSES supports the development of a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity energy networks to meet projected demand levels; the proposed development is considered consistent with, and will provide, both direct and indirect support, to the attainment of the above RSES policy objectives.

3.5 Local Planning Policy Context

3.5.1 Mayo County Development Plan 2014-2020 (as varied and extended)

The Mayo County Development Plan (MCDP) provides a framework of policies and objectives structured under topic headings. Those considered of relevance to the proposed development are reflected hereunder. The MCDP has been extended until the 20th September 2022 to allow the adoption of the draft county development plan currently under consideration.

Infrastructure Strategy

Table 3 of the MCDP (Priority Infrastructure Projects for County Mayo 2014-2020), identifies that in respect of energy infrastructure, priority projects include the development of a 400 kV line and other new 110 kV circuits as required and associated upgrades to existing transmission lines.

Policy PY-02: It is the policy of the Council, in conjunction with all relevant statutory agencies and infrastructure providers to provide, or facilitate the provision of, high quality sustainable infrastructure to serve the economic and social needs of the County through the implementation of the objectives below.

Objective I-01: It is an objective of the Council to provide, or facilitate the provision of, all infrastructure projects set out in Table 3, with priority given to infrastructure serving the Linked-Hub and Key Towns or areas where significant environmental or safety issues are evident and require the particular infrastructure to solve the issues and where it can be demonstrated that the development will not have significant adverse effects on the environment, the integrity of the Natura 2000 network or visual amenity.

Energy

EY-01 It is an objective of the Council to support and facilitate the provision of a reliable energy supply in the County, with emphasis on increasing energy supplies derived from renewable resources whilst seeking to protect and maintain biodiversity, wildlife habitats, the landscape, nature conservation, and residential amenity.

EY-05 It is an objective of the Council to support and facilitate the provision of a high-quality electricity infrastructure in the County, whilst seeking to protect and maintain biodiversity, wildlife habitats, scenic amenities, including protected views and nature conservation.

Environment, Heritage & Amenity Strategy

NH-01 It is an objective of the Council to protect, enhance, conserve and, where appropriate restore:

…c) Features of natural interest and amenity, which provide a unique habitat for wildlife including ecological networks (including ecological corridors and stepping stones), riparian zones, hedgerows, stonewalls and shelterbelts.

NH-04 It is an objective of the Council to fully integrate wildlife and biodiversity considerations into all areas of the Council's roles and responsibilities and into all its works and operations.

NH-09 It is an objective of the Council to utilise appropriate opportunities to enhance and create wildlife habitats where they arise.

The proposed North Connacht development is a proposed development which is consistent with, and expressly supported and facilitated by the Development Plan policies and objectives in respect of infrastructure and energy provision.

3.5.1.1 Draft Mayo County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Draft Mayo County Development Plan strategic aim in respect of infrastructural development is "To protect, improve and provide water, wastewater, surface water and flood alleviation services throughout the county, and to facilitate the provision of high-quality information communication technology, broadband, telecommunication information and electricity network required to support and enhance the key aims of best place to live, work, visit and invest."

In relation to the Green Economy, the Draft Plan also "aims to recognise and develop the full potential of green energy including biomass for energy production/ manufacturing and the export of green electricity to the national grid. "*It is specifically noted that "Mayo County Council will continue to work alongside key energy providers in facilitating the future development of networks throughout the county. The Council is also cognisant of national policy, which seeks to promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment, to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050*."

In the above regard, the plan highlights the fact that "EirGrid has replaced the Grid West project with the North Connacht 110kV project, which will begin at the Moy substation near Ballina and end at Tonroe, Ballaghaderreen. The upgrading of the transmission network will facilitate power flows from both renewable and conventional sources to maximise the use of existing power corridors. In connecting renewable energy from the North-West to the grid, this new project will reinforce the electricity network, supporting Mayo County Council's aim to enhance the attractiveness of the county as a place in which to live, work and invest".

The following policies and objectives which relate to the electricity and transmission system, are of relevance to the proposed development:

Policy

INP 18 To support the provision of high-quality, electricity infrastructure and development of an enhanced electricity supply, to serve the existing and future needs of the county and to facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects, including the delivery and integration of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner, whilst seeking to minimise any adverse impacts on local communities and protect and maintain bio-diversity, wildlife habitats, scenic amenities, including protected views and nature conservation.

INP 19 To co-operate and liaise with statutory and other energy providers in relation to power generation, in order to ensure adequate power capacity for the existing and future business and enterprise needs of the county.

INP 20 To support the statutory providers of national grid infrastructure by safeguarding such strategic corridors from encroachment by other developments that might compromise the provision of energy networks where strategic route corridors have been identified.

Objectives

INO 36 To facilitate the progression of and implement improvements to the existing electricity networks and facilitate the development of new transmission infrastructure projects in accordance with EirGrid's Implementation Plan Strategy 2020-2025 (or any superseding strategy) that might be brought forward during the lifetime of this plan.

INO 37 To ensure the provision, where feasible, of electricity cables located underground.

INO 38 To seek the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to facilitate linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid, in a sustainable and timely manner.

The proposed North Connacht development is a proposed development which is consistent with, and expressly supported and facilitated by the Development Plan policies and objectives in respect of infrastructure and energy provision.

3.5.2 Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 was adopted at a Special Planning Meeting on the 8th March 2022 and came into effect on 19th April 2022.

The Roscommon County Development Plan Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) accompanies the County Development Plan. "The primary aim of the RES is to ensure that County Roscommon continues to address climate change through facilitating appropriately located renewable energy developments…". The strategic aims of the RES are reflected as policy objectives within the County Development Plan. The following policies and objectives within the County Development Plan which relate to the electricity and transmission system are considered of relevance to the proposed development:

Electricity Generation

It is a policy objective of Roscommon County Council to:

CAEE 8.3 Support developments and actions that assist in achieving the national targets for energy from renewable energy, from renewable resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy production.

CAEE 8.9 Work in collaboration with EirGrid and other service providers and statutory bodies to facilitate a modern electricity network within the county, in line with recognised best practice. The Council will require comprehensive studies to be undertaken for all technical and environmental considerations, to inform the assessment of proposed transmission routes.

CAEE 8.15 Engage proactively with developers for proposals within the built environment, which could provide opportunities to integrate with existing green infrastructure networks and contribute to the protection and enhancement of green assets.

CAEE 8.16 Support the ongoing preservation, maintenance and enhancement of green areas and green infrastructure within the built environment, to reduce carbon dioxide and mitigate against the risk of flooding.

Renewable Energy Strategy

Section 5 of the RES discusses aspects of the national grid and notes the fact that "EirGrid have identified a number of projects in the North West region which will ensure that the projected population growth will be serviced by sufficient electricity infrastructure". The proposed subject North Connacht development proposal is also highlighted as part of the future development of the national grid.

RES Aim 7: Encourage and facilitate the provision of strategic infrastructure in appropriate areas of the county, in order to facilitate the provision and potential exportation of renewable energy.

The proposed North Connacht development is a proposed development which is consistent with, and supported and facilitated by, the Development Plan policies and objectives, including those of the associated Renewable Energy Strategy, in respect of infrastructure and electricity generation.

3.5.3 Local Area Plans

3.5.3.1 Ballina and Environs Development Plan 2009-2015 (as varied and extended)

The Ballina and Environs Development Plan (BEDP) was adopted in May 2009 and varied three times prior to its statutory expiration. It was automatically extended in accordance with the provisions of section 11A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The BEDP will be replaced by the Ballina Town & Environs Local Area Plan 2021-2027 which is currently being prepared.

The following relevant electricity infrastructure policy and objective are stated within the BEDP:

Policy

- Facilitate the development of adequate electricity and telecommunications infrastructure to accommodate the future needs of Ballina
- The development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as a key factor for supporting the needs of the community and attracting investment to the Region
- The Councils support the infrastructural development of ESB Networks in the Ballina area.

Objectives

IS1 Assist the electricity infrastructure provider in the installation of necessary infrastructure

The proposed Ballina Relief Road is listed as a specific road objective within the BEDP, under objective T16 and T17, and is illustrated in Map No.7 Specific Objectives.

T16 Develop Stage 1 of the outer ring road linking the N26 (Foxford Road) with the N59– West (Crossmolina Road) and the R314 (Killala Road).

T17 Develop Stage 2 of the outer ring road linking the N26 (Foxford Road) with the N59– East (Sligo Road).

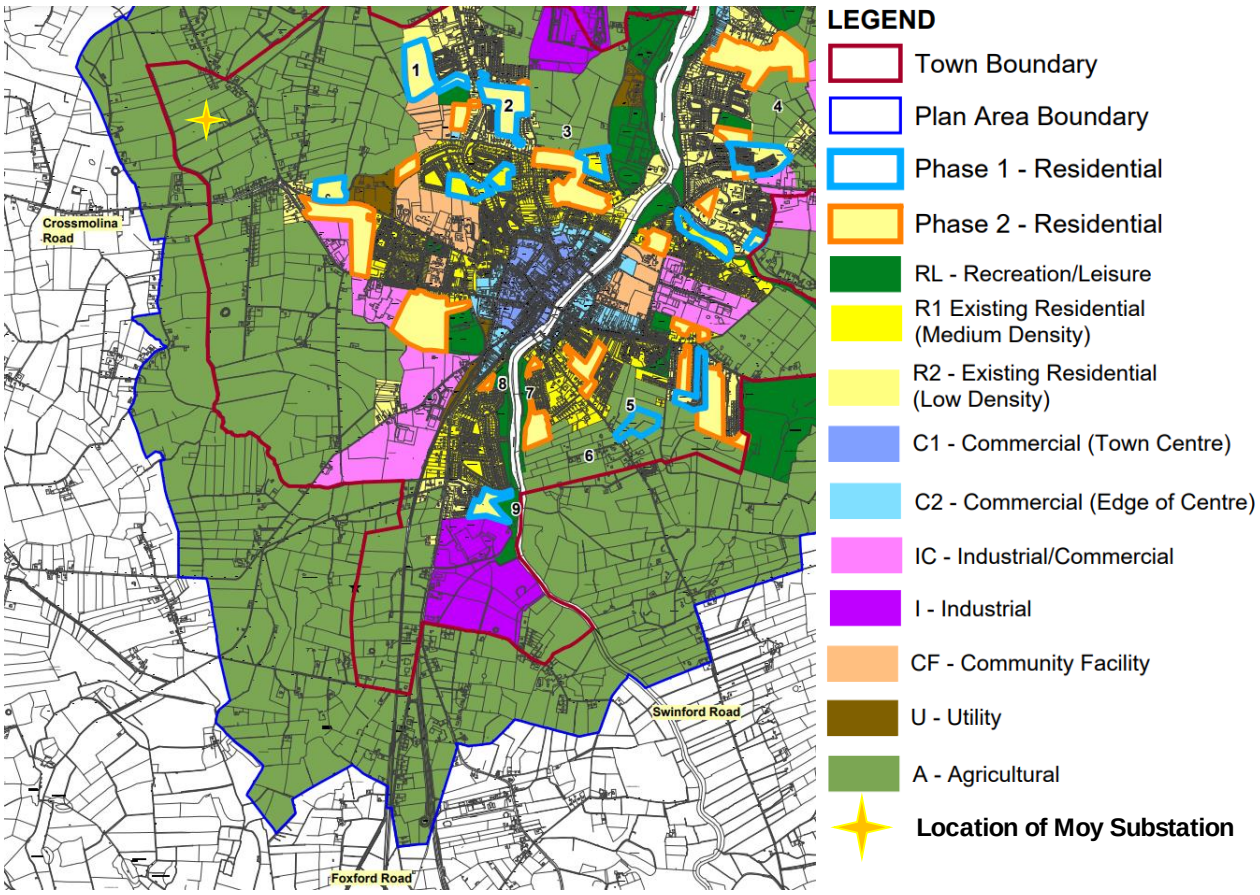
Phase 1 of the relief road is listed in Table 6.5 of the Draft Mayo County Development Plan as a national road development in county Mayo. Transport Infrastructure Ireland lists the current status of the

proposed relief road as “suspended”. The proposed development will be completed in advance of the proposed relief road but will not inhibit the future construction of the relief road.

Land Use Zoning

The UGC routing is predominately within the public road within the BEDP boundary, the majority of public roads are unzoned. The only section of the UGC route in the public road which does not fall within unzoned lands has been categorised to correspond with its adjoining land use zoning objective – ‘agricultural’. The UGC traverses a further two land use zonings, namely, ‘industrial’ (Hollister UC site) and ‘recreational’ (HDD compound southeast of Hollister UC site).

Figure 3.1 Land Use Zoning with Ballina & Environs Development Plan



Source: Map No.6 (Variation) Land Use Zoning, Ballina & Environs Development Plan 2009-2015 (as varied and extended)

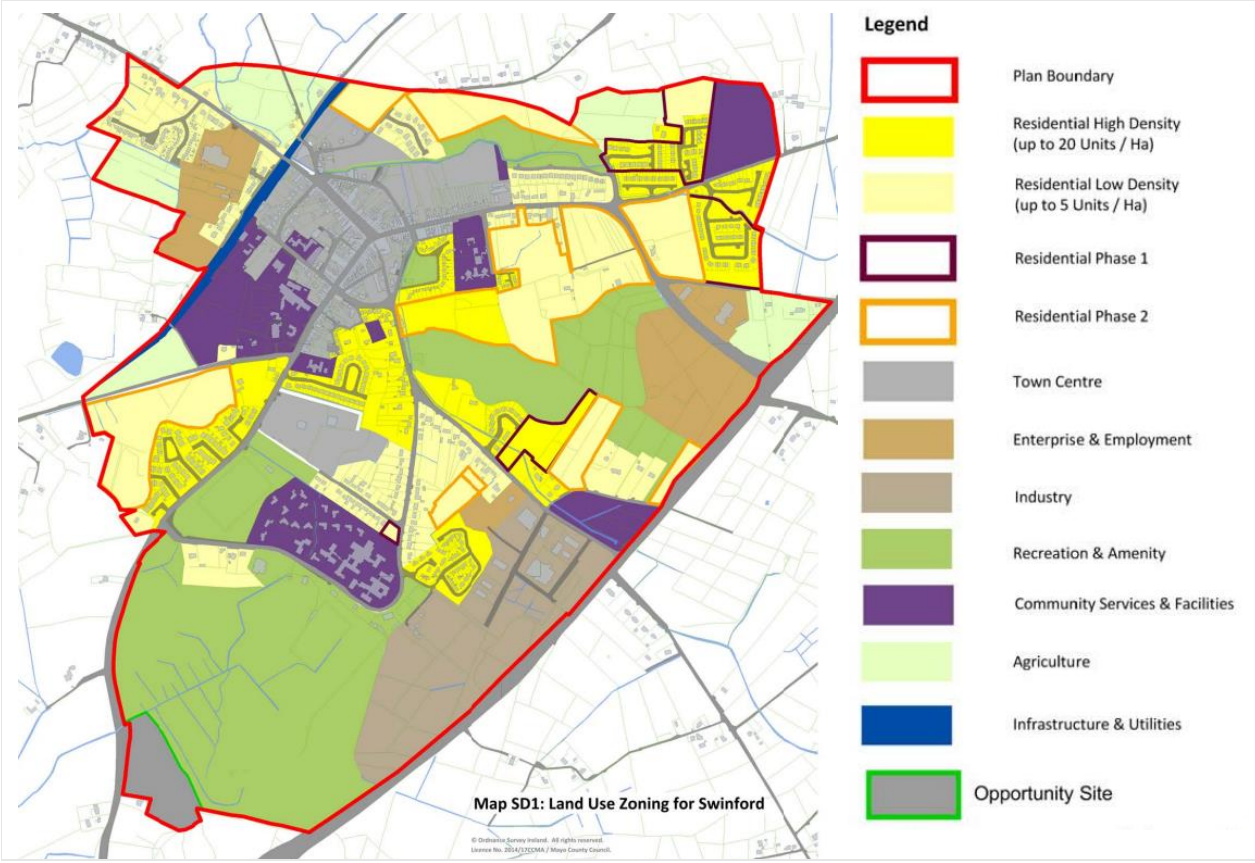
The routing of the UGC within these land use zonings will not result in any impediment to the achievement of their respective land use zoning objectives. The UGC routing within the industrial zoning is within the existing access road at Hollister UC site, as an existing industrial site there is no impact to the industrial zoning objective which seeks *“to provide for manufacturing and office-based industry/non-retail warehousing*”. The UCG will not impede on any agricultural or recreational activities post construction as ground conditions will be reinstated.

3.5.3.2 Swinford Area Plan (within Mayo County Development Plan (2014-2020)

A decision was taken by Mayo County Council to incorporate the Local Area Plans for the several settlements into the extant County Development Plan, this includes Swinford. The area plans should be read in conjunction with the overall context of the Mayo County Development Plan 2014-2020 and not as a standalone plan.

The Swinford Area Plan does not include any specific electricity infrastructure policies or objectives, instead it focuses on the redevelopment and revitalisation of the town. Under objective KTSD-01, development is encouraged to be in accordance with the land us zoning map – SD1 (refer to Figure 3.2); however, the UGC route is entirely within the public road through the town which are not zoned in Map SD1. The UGC routing will not encroach upon any other land use zonings. The proposed development will not impact the achievement of any of the other objectives within the Swinford Area Plan relating to redevelopment, recreational amenity, protection of heritage structures, protection of the western rail corridor and Spaddagh and Derryronan rivers and River Moy Special Area of Conservation.

Figure 3.2 Land Use Zoning within Swinford Area Plan



Source: Mayo County Council, Mayo County Development Plan 2014-2020

3.5.3.3 Ballaghaderreen Local Area Plan, 2017-2023

The existing Tonroe substation is located outside the plan boundary for Ballaghaderreen Local Area Plan 2017-2023, as illustrated within Figure 3.3. Notwithstanding its location outside the plan boundary, it is noted that the overall (cable route) application boundary includes alignment along the Sligo Road (R293), as this is designated as a construction traffic route for Tonroe substation. Consequently, the energy policies of this local area plan were also reviewed.

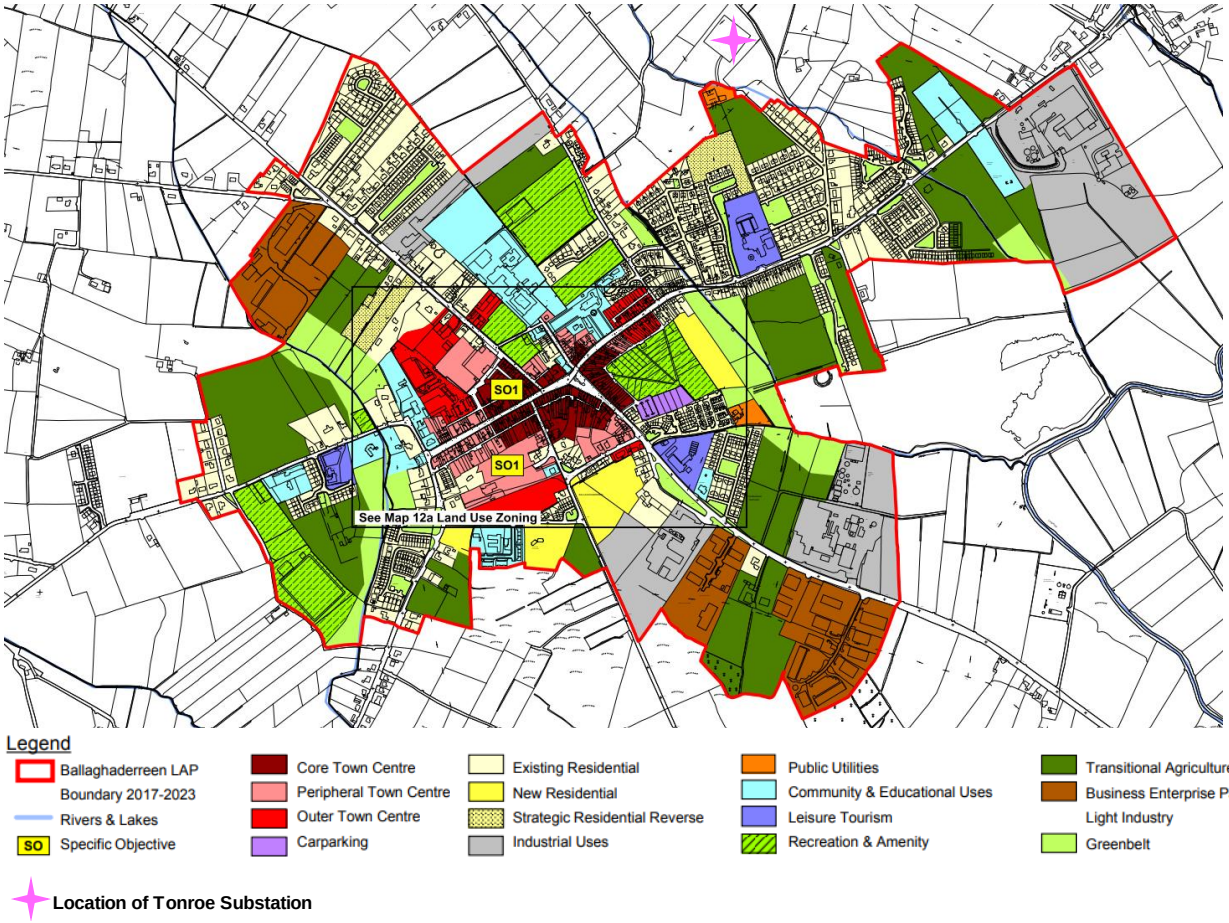
The LAP includes mention of the North Connacht 110 kV Project in its previous iteration – i.e. Grid West. In this regard, the local area plan states that the "Council recognises that the development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the area".

In addition to the above, the following energy policy supports the proposed development.

Objective 31 Co-operate and liaise with statutory and non-statutory providers in order to facilitate energy infrastructure provision, including the development of renewable energy sources at suitable locations.

As part of the development of the North Connacht 110 kV Project, pre-application consultations were held with Roscommon County Council, as noted in Table 1.2.

Figure 3.3 Land Use Zoning within Ballaghaderreen



Source: Ballaghaderreen Local Area Plan 2017-2023

3.6 Sectoral Policy

3.6.1 EirGrid's Shaping our Electricity Future – A Roadmap to Achieve our Renewable Ambition

In 2021, EirGrid published a Roadmap – *Shaping our Electricity Future* - to achieving at least 70% of electricity coming from renewable sources by 2030; this is seen as an important step on the journey to 80% to get to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The Roadmap is the product of a major public and stakeholder consultation regarding how as a nation and society we can reach these ambitious targets.

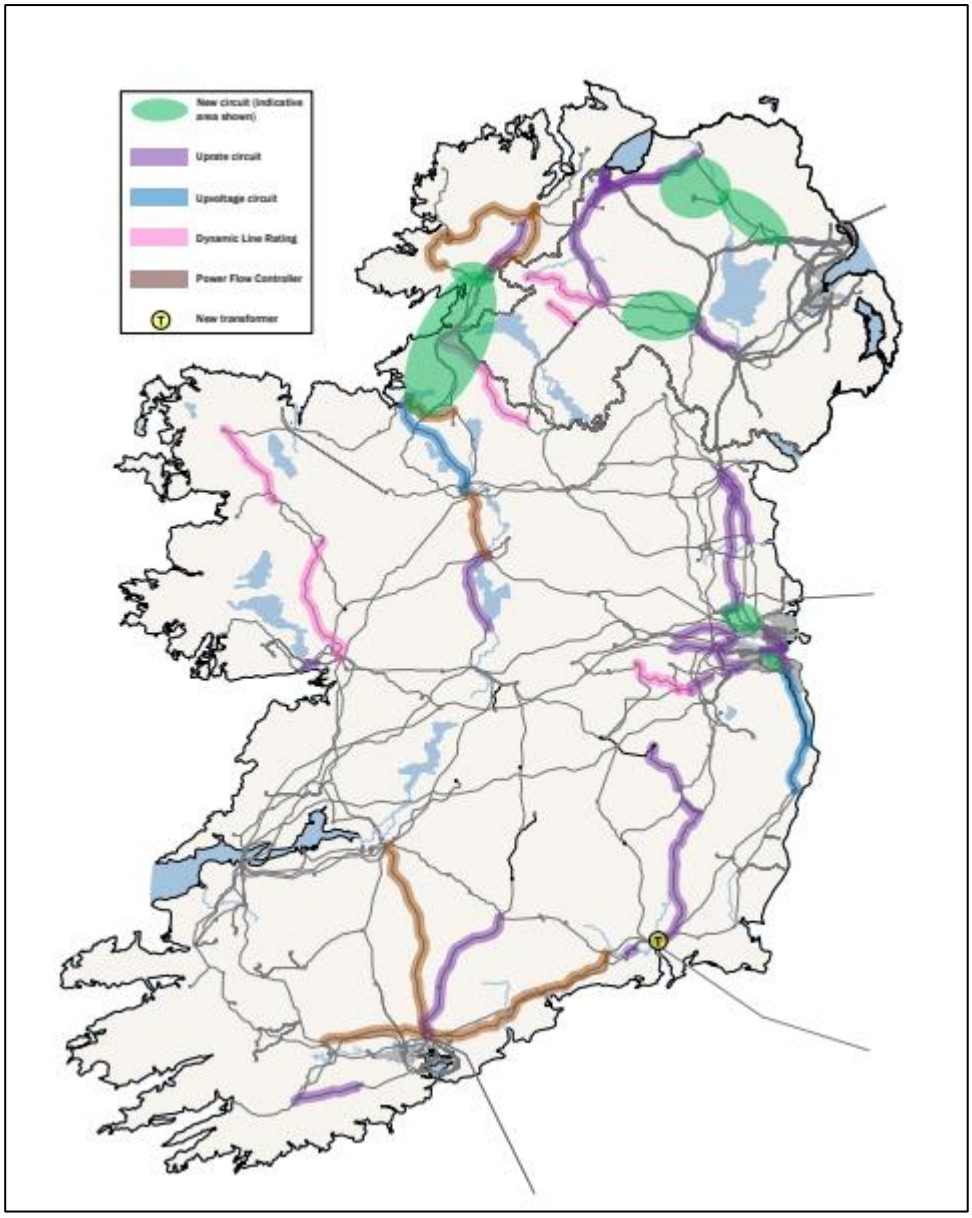
The consultation focused on four distinct network development approaches to achieving this renewable ambition.

- Generation-led approach – Put clean electricity generation close to where most power is used. The most likely outcome from this approach would be, for example, more wind farms off the east coast of the island of Ireland. However, connecting them to the grid would not require much grid infrastructure apart from some new lines or cables.

- Developer-led approach – Let developers decide where to locate clean electricity generation. At least 10 of the projects needed to make the grid ready for this approach will be significant in size as they will need to move large amounts of power over long distances. There will also need to be several substantial new substations.
- Technology-led approach – Try new technological ways to move clean electricity across the country. This approach uses several high-voltage underground electricity cables moving power from the west to the east of Ireland and the north-west to the east of Northern Ireland. Each cable would need large converter stations at either end so that power can reconnect to the grid. Converter stations are large buildings, but we can reduce their visual impact with careful landscaping.

- Demand-led approach – Put large electricity users close to sources of clean electricity generation. This approach would locate new data centres and other high-demand users near major towns and cities in the west and south of Ireland and the north-west of Northern Ireland. It would also see many more wind and solar farms in these areas.

Based on the modelling undertaken by EirGrid, and its refinement in response to public and stakeholder consultation, EirGrid completed a set of transmission network planning studies. These studies help determine what potential transmission network projects will be required by 2030 to deliver our renewable ambition and is reproduced below.



Source: EirGrid's Shaping Our Electricity Future

Overall, between now and 2030 there needs to be a transformational step change in the volume of network reinforcements delivered across Ireland and Northern Ireland to support the Renewable Ambition in an efficient and effective manner.

Importantly, *Shaping* notes that prior to commencing the transmission needs identification process, a number of transmission projects were included in EirGrid's network model, including grid reinforcements that are scheduled to complete by 2030. Therefore, the base case network model analysed for 2030 consists of the transmission network as it is today plus these critical projects. The North Connacht 110 kV project is one of those new circuits which are assumed in service and included in the base network model.

3.6.2 EirGrid Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029

The Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029 (TDP) sets out the development of the Irish transmission network over a nine-year period to the year 2029. The TDP presents projects which are needed for the operation of the transmission network whilst also identifying future needs that may drive future potential projects.

There is an obligation on EirGrid to provide all customers with a 'safe, secure, reliable, economical, and efficient transmission network to meet all reasonable demands for electricity, in accordance with legal obligations' (TDP Appendix B, p.81) which is essential to enabling economic activity and economic growth.

Under this context, drivers of transmission network development are summarised as:

- ensuring the security of electricity supply;
- ensuring the competitiveness of the national economy; and
- ensuring the long-term sustainability of electricity supply in the country.

The plan highlights that achieving these strategic objectives, requires investment in the development and maintenance of the electricity transmission network including, but not limited to, securing transmission network supplies and promoting the integration of Renewable Energy Sources (RES) and complementary thermal generation. It is also identified that in order to accommodate electricity demand or generation changes to the transmission network due to continuing investment, it will be necessary to modify or strengthen the transmission network to ensure performance and reliability levels are upheld.

The TDP identifies that within the Border, Midlands and West area excess energy generation is set to increase significantly in the coming years, due to generators that currently have connection agreements and live connection offers connecting to the transmission and distribution networks (new generation and battery connections required for solar, wind and battery projects, p. 41). It is acknowledged that the anticipated increase in power flows from new electricity generation and interconnectors will require network reinforcement to enable the efficient transfer of power to the areas with high load and demand, such as the eastern seaboard. The proposed North Connacht project is listed in the TDP (p.40) as a project required for 'Reinforcement of the Transmission Network within and out of Mayo'.

The generation contracted to connect in the area could result in overloads on the existing infrastructure, under both intact network and single contingency conditions. Even if the existing 110kV network was uprated the level of generation will still exceed the network capacity. The driver for the North Connacht project is to allow the integration of RES. Additionally, the proposed development will enable the transmission network to safely accommodate the diverse power flows associated which are a result of excess regional RES generation.

3.6.3 EirGrid 'Ireland's Grid Development Strategy – Your Grid, Your Tomorrow' (2017)

EirGrid's 'Ireland's Grid Development Strategy' (GDS), supersedes EirGrid's Grid25 (2008) long-term strategy to develop Ireland's electricity grid. Following a review of consultation feedback, and the Government White Paper – Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030 (2015), the Action Plan for Jobs and Industrial Development Authority (IDA)'s 2015-2019 Strategy, EirGrid's updated grid development strategy reflects Ireland's updated economic context and emerging new technologies.

The GDS identifies the need for investment in the electricity transmission system and for a long-term strategy to develop the electricity grid. The objective is to optimise the existing grid to meet projected demand levels, policy objectives and to ensure a long-term sustainable and competitive energy future for Ireland.

The GDS currently provides enough capacity to meet demand forecasts in all regions; however, due to projected increased demand pressures as well as the need to connect new and future generation onto the grid, the system requires uprating, reinforcing, extension and investment. The GDS notes that depending on future permitted development, the grid may require new transmission solutions, such as the proposed development, to accommodate large-scale facilities in various parts of the country.

In consideration of the growing electricity demand, the GDS acknowledges that the long-term renewal of the transmission grid will need to be consistent with wider national, social, environmental, economic and energy policies. The GDS identifies two broad policy domains which transmission development will need to comply with:

- renewable energy targets; and
- development of a sustainable energy power system.

The achievement of these policy objectives within the strategy framework will facilitate social, economic and environmental benefits for Ireland. Specifically, the GDS presents two long-term benefits associated with a secure and reliable electricity transmission gird for the overall economy:

- It provides power capacity to support new investment and jobs; and
- It ensures competitiveness by having cost-effective power capacity.

Operation of a modern transmission grid will facilitate increased operational security which will subsequently increase the grid's ability to integrate electricity generated from renewable sources such wind and solar. The proposed development will therefore support national renewable energy targets and a sustainable approach to regional development.

The Technical Report which is appended to the GDS lists the proposed development as a 'Notable Regional Project' within the West Region.

3.6.4 EirGrid's Grid Implementation Plan 2017-2022 For the Electricity Transmission System in Ireland

The Grid Implementation Plan (IP) sets out EirGrid's approach to the planning and development of the grid that will be undertaken in implementing the Grid Development Strategy. The IP identifies parts of the transmission system requiring development within the lifetime of the IP and identifies at a strategic level

the issues, policies and objectives that will be addressed in developing the grid. The IP was adopted in December 2018 following public consultation and is accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

All of the policies and objectives detailed within the IP have been assessed against strategic environmental objectives (SEOs) within the accompanying SEA. The SEOs are used as standards against which the IP can be assessed in order to identify any likely significant environmental effects. The SEA concluded that the policies and objectives of the IP are positive in nature as they seek to:

- Serve the electricity needs of the county in a sustainable manner;
- Avoid and mitigate environmental effects;
- Promote the use of existing grid infrastructure;
- Implement and improve existing internal guidance, processes and procedure for development;
- Incorporate social impact assessment into the grid development process;
- Promote new technologies in transmission infrastructure development;
- Increase transparency and public participation in the grid development process;
- Contribute to Irelands achievement of its renewable energy targets;
- Contribute to combating climate change; and
- Support the EPA key actions outlined in their 2016 State of the Environment Report.

The SEA provided recommendations to strengthen the policies and objectives of the IP including the rewording of policies or objectives and addition of new objectives following public consultation. The recommendations were included in the adopted IP.

The IP includes a total of 57no. plan policies and objectives to ensure that the environmental issues are considered in the process of Grid development and that Natura 2000 sites are protected. These policies and objectives are based on six categories as follows:

1. Environment (31no. policies/objectives)
2. Technology (4no. policies/objectives)
3. Project Development (4no. policies/objectives)
4. Planning and Consenting of Projects (4no. policies/objectives)
5. Consultation and Engagement (6no. policies/objectives)
6. Human Beings and Society (5no. policies/objectives)

It is considered that the policies and objectives within the Grid Implementation Plan, and the mitigation proposed as part of the SEA (statutory and non-statutory processes) contribute to the sustainable development of the transmission system in Ireland over the lifetime of the plan and beyond.

3.6.5 County Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy 2011-2022

The County Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy sets out a path to allow County Mayo to contribute to meeting national legally binding renewable energy targets, and a framework to harness renewable energy in a sustainable manner in order to assist in combating climate change.

The Strategy expressly highlights that in order to achieve the national renewable energy targets and the objectives of the Strategy, improvements and the provision of new infrastructure to the electricity transmission network in Mayo is considered imperative for all renewable energy technologies. The policies and objectives reflected hereunder, are considered to be most relevant to the subject development proposal.

Policy 3 Strategic Infrastructure It is the policy of the Council to encourage and assist in the provision of strategic infrastructure at appropriate locations to facilitate the provision and exporting of renewable energy.

Objective 3.1 It is an objective of the Council to actively pursue the upgrading of the national grid and for the provision of a 400 kV line in Mayo with the Minister, The Commission for Energy Regulation and EirGrid.

Objective 3.2 It is an objective of the council that the final route of any new 110/220 or 400 kV transmission lines be selected in line with best International Practice. Among other things, this process will require that a highly detailed study be carried out incorporating technical and environmental considerations to assist in selecting the most appropriate route. As part of this process the feasibility of using all existing linear infrastructure corridors such as road and rail as well as the existing transmission corridors for the 110 kV and 38 kV circuits or their established way leaves should be given due consideration. The existing transmission corridors for the 110 kV and 38 kV circuits shall be followed as far as technically and environmentally practicable.

The proposed development comprises strategic transmission related energy infrastructure which will upgrade and extend the grid, and thus facilitate the provision and exporting of renewable energy, in accordance with Policy 3 and Objective 3.1 of the Strategy.

In accordance with Objective 3.2, the route of the proposed development has been proposed in line with best International Practice, incorporating both technical, environmental and social considerations. The proposed North Connacht project is therefore a proposed development which is consistent with, as well as supported and facilitated by the County Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy.

3.6.6 Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure

In 2012 the Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources published a “Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure”.

The statement highlights the need and urgency for the new energy infrastructure for the economy, delivery of regional development, creation of jobs and growth and ensure the wellbeing of everyone as well as realising the economic potential of Ireland’s own renewable energy resources. It states that significant energy infrastructure is required to deliver a world class electricity transmission system in all regions of the country. The Government endorses, supports and promotes the strategy programmes of the energy infrastructure providers.

The statement further states that “energy infrastructure developers are encouraged to work with the forward planning processes at regional and local level to set a clear context for assessment of individual

applications for planning consent to facilitate as wide a degree of consensus as possible as to how (and where) to meet grid development needs". The requirement for the proposed development is clearly identified through the transmission network capacity restrictions on the existing local network which are inhibiting the connection of renewable energy sources. The statement requires energy developers to adhere to international and national standards on health, environment, biodiversity, landscape and safety and address or mitigate any associated impacts in delivery the best possible engineering solutions. This process is aligned with EirGrid's six-step Framework for Grid Development. The North Connacht project is supported by, as well as supporting the Government's Policy Statement for new strategic energy infrastructure.

3.7 Conclusion

The proposed development will provide a new circuit in the electricity transmission network in the northwest of Ireland. This new circuit will connect new renewable generation to help with to contribute to reaching our electricity generation from renewables targets set out in the Climate Action Plan.

Having regard to all of the above, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with, and indeed will assist in the delivery of, key strategic energy objectives and land use development policies, set out in European, national, regional, and local statements, policies and plans.

The proposed development is considered to be consistent with proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

4.0 Social and Community Engagement

4.1 Government and EirGrid Policy on Community Gain since 2012

In 2012, the then Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR[10]) published a "Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure". The Policy Statement provided clear direction on incorporating community gain considerations into major energy infrastructure projects. In particular, the Policy Statement stated that:

"The Government would like to see enhanced co-operation with local authorities on the potential for delivering landscape, biodiversity and civic amenity benefits as part of Grid 25 and other energy infrastructure development. Delivering long lasting benefits to communities is an important way of achieving public acceptability for infrastructure… The Government therefore underlines the appropriateness for the State Companies and energy project developers to examine appropriate means of building community gain considerations into their project budgeting and planning. The Government is therefore fully supportive of a community gain approach in the delivery of energy infrastructure."

In the period following the publication of the Policy Statement, EirGrid engaged with the then DCENR, the then Commission for Energy Regulation (CER18), the then Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG19) as well as other key stakeholders focusing on the development of a suitable EirGrid community gain strategy. This strategy resulted in the establishment and implementation of a community gain policy from January 2014.

In 2019, EirGrid updated its Community Gain policy to incorporate considerations for underground cables and the phasing of community fund payments which allowed for a community fund to be activated across three phases of a project. The provisions of proximity payments were also amended.

In 2020, a further review of Community Benefit was undertaken in EirGrid to ensure alignment with its new Strategy and wider policy framework.

4.2 An Enhanced Approach to Community Benefit

When EirGrid chooses routes for its linear projects, it tries to create as little disturbance as possible. However, it is acknowledged that this work has an impact on landowners and neighbouring communities, and that the provision of new infrastructure requires local support, co-operation and knowledge. That is why EirGrid will compensates landowners who are directly affected by a project – i.e. accommodating new infrastructure – as well as providing a benefit to local communities when developing new infrastructure.

For the North Connacht Project, this means that a community benefit fund scheme will be established if the project goes ahead. Communities across the entire UGC route will benefit from this. This will ensure that the proposed development will leave a positive legacy on the communities who will facilitate its realisation.

[10] DCENR is now the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)

The fund will be distributed in 3 phases – once construction begins, in the middle of construction and once the project is fully energised. EirGrid will work with a local North Connacht Community Forum of stakeholders and partners to do this - this is currently being set up. The fund will focus on 3 priority themes – Community, Sustainability and Biodiversity, in recognition of Ireland's Climate Action Plan and the communities' role in achieving this. Where previously a fund was determined for a project and delivered through a community grants process, the new fund will provide that fund value for each of the 3 priority themes.

The North Connacht Community Forum is an initiative which will bring together representatives from community, social and sporting organisations in the project area, ensuring community views can be discussed, understood and properly considered prior to and during project delivery.

The frequency of meetings and items for discussion at the forum is led by the forum members which also includes local elected representatives. Irish Rural Link (IRL), a non-profit national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe has been appointed as the community forum's independent facilitator.

In addition to providing a forum for dialogue between stakeholders with interests in the project and the project team, the Community Forum will also be invited to input on the design and implementation of the North Connacht Community Benefit Fund.

5.0 Planning Appraisal

5.1 Introduction

This section provides the applicant's appraisal of the proposed development in the context of proper planning and sustainable development.

5.2 Need for the Proposed Development

The need for the project has been outlined in Section 1.5 of this report. The North Connacht Project, an underground connection between Moy Substation and Tonroe Substation will ensure integration of the additional generation into the existing network along with the existing pre-Gate 3 wind generation and should result in an increase of transfer capability on the transmission network. This will ensure compliance with EirGrid's Transmission System Security and Planning Standards[11] (TSSPS).

The proposed development will facilitate the transport of electricity across the region. It will also ensure security of supply for customers and provide the robust electricity infrastructure required by industry across North Connacht. This project supports plans to boost business and investment in the region.

The North Connacht 110 kV project will contribute to the government's objective of a low-carbon energy future. At present, a large amount of renewable electricity is generated by wind farms in the North Connacht region with more planned over the coming years. The level of renewable generation in the region is far greater than the capacity of the local electricity network.

5.3 Evaluation of Proposed Development having regard to Planning Policies

The Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure (2012) seeks to ensure that the imperative need for development and renewal of our energy networks is met, in order to achieve both economic and social policy goals. The government is clear that Ireland's ability to attract and retain Foreign Direct Investment and sustain Irish enterprise depends on guaranteeing energy supply at competitive cost at all times. Continuing the steady level of development and renewal of the networks is essential to ensure that Ireland's energy system is fit for purpose, safe and secure, and ready to meet increased demand as economic conditions improve.

The Policy Statement points to the energy policies which have already been embedded within the national planning policy under the National Planning Framework. The National Planning Framework supports the development of the electricity network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of

[11] http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/EirGrid-Transmission-System-Security-and-Planning-Standards-TSSPS-Final-May-2016-APPROVED.pdf

renewable energy. The RSES specifically acknowledges and names the North Connacht Project as a significant energy infrastructure project of national and regional importance.

The Mayo and Roscommon County Development Plans also supports the sustainable development, upgrade and expansion of the electricity transmission grid, storage and distribution network infrastructure.

The proposed development is therefore supported by national, regional and local planning policy and objectives, as set out in Section 3 of this Report.

5.4 Consideration of Alternatives

The proposed development has been developed in accordance with EirGrid's six-step Framework for Grid Development. This Framework reflects EirGrid's values and approach to grid development. In accordance with the Framework, a detailed analysis of feedback has been central to the process informing the identification of the proposed development.

As set out in considerable detail in Section 4 of the PECR, the project development process has considered a range of alternatives. These included four overhead line corridors and three underground cable routes with various corridor links between the options within this.

Decisions made in the context of consideration of these alternatives ultimately identified the Best Performing Option (Step 4), and subsequently the proposed development now before An Bord Pleanála (Step 5).

In particular, within Step 5, subsequent to announcement of the Best Performing Option following engagement with the communities at Ballaghaderreen, Swinford and Ballina, EirGrid confirmed alternative and off-road local routing options for the cable at these towns, in preference to laying the UGC within their main street areas. This engagement concluded that the off-road option in the Ballaghaderreen and Ballina comprises the Best Performing Option for the proposed development.

Overall, the design and location of the proposed development is considered by EirGrid to comprise the best balance between Technical, Environmental, Economic, Socio-Economic and Deliverability criteria, having regard to the nature, extent and strategic need for the overall planned North Connacht project.

As noted in Section 2 of this report, the scale and extent of the project will meet currently anticipated capacity requirements to accommodate transmission of renewable generation, and to provide robust, secure and reliable electricity supply to the region, which is a key enabler of job creation, and the attracting of economic investment. Should future capacity requirements increase beyond that currently anticipated, this can be facilitated by the proposed development, such as by the provision of higher capacity 110 kV conductors/cables. Moreover, should the need arise at some point in the future lifetime of this circuit, the UGC technology could potentially include the future replacement of 110 kV cables with 220 kV cables – subject to statutory consent requirements and processes. In summary, the proposed development offers the most flexible alternative to meeting current and future needs of the North Connacht area in terms of provision of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure. The Do-Nothing scenario has also been considered in the PECR. Non implementation of the proposed

development would mean foregoing the benefits of a new network connection and slowing down the integration of renewable energy required to combat climate change and reduced security of supply.

5.5 Planning and Environmental Considerations Report (PECR)

This application for Approval includes an PECR prepared with regard to the requirements of EU and Irish national law, policy and practice, including Annex IV of the codified EIA Directive, and Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended. Full details are provided in the application documentation.

This project is to be developed by ESB who will coordinate all detailed design, procurement and construction work and to ensure that the whole project is completed as required and in time.

Arising from this, the planning process facilitates EirGrid in adopting a general arrangement / project design approach to securing consent for the proposed development. In so doing, all environmental assessments that have informed the proposal represent a reasonable worst-case scenario. This approach ensures that a worst-case scenario is assessed from an environmental perspective, but that innovation and value engineering is possible within this parameter. It also ensures that the approach to the overall development is a precautionary one but with some allowance being possible if a lesser impact option is possible when the project is going through the detailed design phase.

Having regard to this approach, it is the case that the UGC infrastructure, including the cable route, joint bays, communications chambers, and other structures and works, have been sited within a red line application area and subject to environmental assessment. Following the consenting of the proposed development, should this be the case by ABP, there will be a process of pre-construction detailed design and siting of the grid infrastructure to ensure its most appropriate permanent location. This will occur within the parameters and assessments of the Approved development; any siting which extends outside such parameters – for example outside the red line application area – will require to be the subject of post-consent modification in accordance with the provisions of statutory legislation.

In this context, EirGrid invites ABP to Grant Approval with Conditions requiring specific details of the development to be agreed with Mayo and Roscommon County Councils, as Planning Authorities for the administrative area of the proposed development. This would include matters such as details of infrastructural layout, construction and associated environmental management, landscaping, materials etc.

5.6 Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

This application for approval includes a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) prepared in accordance with the requirements of EU and Irish national law, policy and practice. Full details are provided in the application documentation.

In summary, the mitigation measures detailed in Section 3.5 of the NIS will ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of any European sites in light of the site's conservation objectives. Based on the assessment of the proposed development alone and in combination with other projects and plans, including the implementation of mitigation measures, it has been concluded by EirGrid that no adverse

effects on the integrity of any European sites will arise, in view of the site's conservation objectives. However, it is noted that the Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken by ABP as Competent Authority.

5.7 Other Matters

5.7.1 Laying of Underground Cables

The laying of underground cables (UGC) is a standard construction technique undertaken by a range of utility and other services providers. This is addressed in some detail in Section 6 of the PECR.

On public roads, traffic control measures will be implemented as appropriate, including road diversions, closures and stop / go traffic management. Joint bays (underground chambers) are used to pull various lengths of UGC through pre-installed ducts and to connect ("joint") together those lengths of UGC into a single overall circuit. Off-road passing bays, constructed adjacent to a joint bay, facilitates the through movement of traffic. The road will be fully reinstated following the laying of the UGC and associated infrastructure.

Section 2 of this report, in respect of Planning History, also discusses matters of construction and reinstatement of the current EirGrid / ESB Networks UGC project between Kilpaddoge and Knockanure substations in North Kerry. The accompanying images in that Section confirm the relatively modest extent of development involved in construction, the successful routine implementation of traffic management measures in particular at joint bays, and the standard of road reinstatement undertaken. This approach and standard is entirely similar to that which will occur with the proposed development.

In this latter regard, and of particular note, EirGrid is proposing that the built-up area of Swinford is treated with particular sensitivity in terms of road reinstatement, given both the volume of traffic using the roads in the town, ongoing Council initiatives for a high quality of road surfacing in the town, and for social and community benefit that might be summarised as community pride in the town. Principles for such road reinstatement in Swinford have been established with Mayo County Council, and it is proposed that these are best developed in terms of detailed design as part of a post-consent agreement of details, based on the parameters and assessments contained in this application for Approval.

Both EirGrid and the appointed cable laying contractor will have dedicated land and community liaison officers to provide advance notice of works to affected communities and landowners, and to address any queries or concerns arising.

5.7.2 Works at the Stations

At the existing substations, Moy and Tonroe, the connection of the proposed development onto the grid network will require new equipment and apparatus within and/or adjacent to the existing substation. From a visual and other environmental perspective, this will have the appearance and function of other long-established form and function at the substation. It will be noted that the existing station infrastructure is at some physical and visual remove from sensitive receptors such as dwellings, such that little if any adverse to human beings will arise from the planned development therein. The

environmental measures set out in the PECR will mitigate any potential impact of the planned equipment on other sensitive receptors in the area.

5.7.3 Electromagnetic Fields (EMF)

The issue of EMF arising from the proposed electrical infrastructure is addressed in detail in Section 5.4.3 Electric and Magnetic Fields of the PECR.

In summary, to avoid any potential public risk in close proximity to electrical infrastructure, national and international health and regulatory authorities have recommended exposure limits for EMF. It is EirGrid's policy to design and operate the electricity transmission system such that these limits are not exceeded. This will also be the case in respect of the proposed development.

6.0 Conclusion

Having regard to the following:

- The provisions of Project Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework;
- The provisions of the Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure (2018);
- The provisions of the Government White Paper - Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030;
- The provisions of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in respect of electricity infrastructure and in specific respect of North Connacht Project (2020);
- The provisions of the Mayo County Development Plan 2014 - 2020 as varied, the Draft Mayo County Development Plan 2012-2027, the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014 - 2020 as varied, the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2012-2027 and other relevant local area plans;
- The provisions of EirGrid's *Shaping Our Electricity Future* Roadmap for development of the transmission grid to meet Climate Action targets;
- The stated need for the proposed development to increase transfer capability on the transmission network. and ensure compliance with EirGrid's Transmission System Security and Planning Standards (TSSPS).:
- The nature, scale and location of the proposed development, primarily as an underground cable (UGC) and associated infrastructure development, and including the provision of extensions to existing station compounds;
- The nature of the receiving environment, including the public road network along which the UGC is proposed to be laid, the pattern of development in the area, and the nature of the landscape including any specific conservation and amenity designations along or in proximity to the proposed development;
- The consideration of alternatives for the design and routing/siting of the proposed development;
- Submissions and other input and advices received from statutory and non-statutory stakeholders during the project development process including the Strategic Infrastructure Division (SID) of An Bord Pleanála and Mayo and Roscommon County Council, as well as from the general public, communities and landowners;
- The documentation prepared for the application for Statutory Approval, including the Planning and Environmental Considerations Assessment Report (PECR) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS);

It is considered by EirGrid that, subject to compliance with the mitigation measures set out in the application for Approval, and in particular the NIS and the PECR, the proposed development:

- Would be in accordance with National policies and guidelines and with regional and local development plan policy;
- Would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity;
- Would not seriously injure the visual or recreational amenities of the area;
- Would not be prejudicial to public health or safety;
- Would not detract from the character or setting of features of architectural or archaeological heritage or the cultural heritage of the area;
- Would not seriously injure the biodiversity in the area; and,
- Would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience.

Having regard to the above, it is concluded by EirGrid that the proposed development would, therefore be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Appendix A

Strategic Infrastructure Development Determination of An Bord Pleanála

Our Case Number: ABP-309913-21

An Bord Pleanála

Thomas Bradley
Eirgrid Plc
The Oval
160 Shelbourne Road,
Ballsbridge
D04 FW28

Date: 13th May 2022

Re: 'North Connacht Project', comprising a new 110 kV transmission circuit, comprising an underground cable (UGC) (approx. 60 km) between two existing stations - Moy 110 kV Substation in the townland of Gorteen (Barony of Tirawley), County Mayo and Tonroe 110 kV Substation in the townland of Ballyoughter, County Roscommon.
townland of Gorteen (Barony of Tirawley), County Mayo and the townland of Ballyoughter, County Roscommon

Dear Sir,

Please be advised that following consultations under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, the Board hereby serves notice that it is of the opinion that the proposed development falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended. Accordingly, the Board has decided that the proposed development would be strategic infrastructure within the meaning of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. Any application for approval for the proposed development must therefore be made directly to An Bord Pleanála under section 182A(1) of the Act.

Please also be informed that the Board considers that the pre-application consultation process in respect of this proposed development is now closed.

In accordance with section 146(5) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, the Board will make available for inspection and purchase at its offices the documents relating to the decision within 3 working days following its decision. This information is normally made available on the list of decided cases on the website on the Wednesday following the week in which the decision is made.

The attachment contains information in relation to challenges to the validity of a decision of An Bord Pleanála under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

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

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

64 Sráid Maoilbhríde
Baile Átha Cliath 1
D01 V902

64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

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

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Caulfield
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-873 7287

VC11

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The following is a schedule of prescribed bodies considered relevant for the purposes of Section 182A(4)(b) of the Principal Act.

Prescribed Bodies

Minister for the Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Minister for Environment, Climate Action and Communications

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Northern and Western Regional Assembly

Mayo County Council

Roscommon County Council

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

Irish Water

Commission for Regulation of Utilities

Fáilte Ireland

An Taisce

The Heritage Council

An Chomhairle Ealaion

Inland Fisheries Ireland

Coras Iompair Eireann

Commission for Railway Regulation

Railway Safety Commission

Judicial review of An Bord Pleanála decisions under the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts (as amended).

A person wishing to challenge the validity of a Board decision may do so by way of judicial review only. Sections 50, 50A and 50B of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as substituted by section 13 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006, as amended/substituted by sections 32 and 33 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and as amended by sections 20 and 21 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011) contain provisions in relation to challenges to the validity of a decision of the Board.

The validity of a decision taken by the Board may only be questioned by making an application for judicial review under Order 84 of The Rules of the Superior Courts (S.I. No. 15 of 1986). Sub-section 50(7) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires that subject to any extension to the time period which may be allowed by the High Court in accordance with subsection 50(8), any application for judicial review must be made within 8 weeks of the decision of the Board. It should be noted that any challenge taken under section 50 may question only the validity of the decision and the Courts do not adjudicate on the merits of the development from the perspectives of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and/or effects on the environment. Section 50A states that leave for judicial review shall not be granted unless the Court is satisfied that there are substantial grounds for contending that the decision is invalid or ought to be quashed and that the applicant has a sufficient interest in the matter which is the subject of the application or in cases involving environmental impact assessment is a body complying with specified criteria.

Section 50B contains provisions in relation to the cost of judicial review proceedings in the High Court relating to specified types of development (including proceedings relating to decisions or actions pursuant to a law of the state that gives effect to the public participation and access to justice provisions of Council Directive 85/337/EEC i.e. the EIA Directive and to the provisions of Directive 2001/12/EC i.e. Directive on the assessment of the effects on the environment of certain plans and programmes). The general provision contained in section 50B is that in such cases each party shall bear its own costs. The Court however may award costs against any party in specified circumstances. There is also provision for the Court to award the costs of proceedings or a portion of such costs to an applicant against a respondent or notice party where relief is obtained to the extent that the action or omission of the respondent or notice party contributed to the relief being obtained.

General information on judicial review procedures is contained on the following website, www.citizensinformation.ie.

Disclaimer: The above is intended for information purposes. It does not purport to be a legally binding interpretation of the relevant provisions and it would be advisable for persons contemplating legal action to seek legal advice.

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