

Environmental Considerations

Overview

ABO Energy is currently undertaking a range of environmental assessments relating to the project. This information will then be presented alongside the planning application for consideration by the planning authority and relevant statutory consultees (technical experts) to assess the potential impact of the proposal. Examples of the topics they will consider include:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Flora and Fauna Assessment
- Bat Assessment
- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage
- Transport, Access and Haulage
- Noise Assessment
- Hydrology
- Grid Connection Assessment

All considerations are site specific and are informed by detailed surveys and assessments. For the purposes of this pre-application community consultation process we have selected key topics to provide further information on below. If you are unsure about any aspect of the environmental considerations or want more information, please speak to a member of our project team.

Climate Change

The urgency to combat climate change is well-known and has been enshrined within the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which commits Northern Ireland to achieving a target of 80% renewable electricity generation by 2030.

Both the Regional Development Strategy and Northern Area Plan (2016), emphasise the importance of delivering a sustainable and secure energy supply by maximising the contribution of renewable energy.

When developed, the Ballyleagry Solar Farm will contribute to Causeway Coast and Glens' and Northern Ireland's fight against climate change by:

- Generating enough renewable electricity to power approximately 10,500 homes and businesses
- Reducing CO2 emissions by approximately 14,500 tons annually

Socio-economic Impact

A recent report by KPMG and RenewableNI called 'Solar Potential: Economic Benefits for Northern Ireland' showed the solar industry has the potential to contribute up to £426 million to the Northern Irish economy GVA over the next five years. The report outlines that the solar energy industry could support 1,800 jobs across NI by 2030.

Contributions through income tax and National Insurance are estimated to be between £57 million - £68 million over the period 2025 – 2030. The solar sector could make the potential contribution of £815 million from capital expenditure and operating expenses, if the industry achieves 900 MW by 2030.

If developed, the Ballyleagry Solar Farm will contribute to these figures whilst also establishing a Community Benefit Fund as part of the project. The fund will provide support for local initiatives and community groups that play an important role in the area. It will be in place for the operational lifetime of the solar farm.

Examples of who has benefited from Community Benefit Funds in other areas include sporting clubs, community initiatives and events, charities, playgroups, nurseries and schools.

Visual amenity and landscape character

The site falls within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 37 Roe Basin as defined by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000. The planning application will be supported by landscape proposals and photomontages / LVIA report prepared by a landscape architect to demonstrate the visual impact of the proposed solar farm from Critical Viewpoints (CVPs) in the surrounding area.

Biodiversity, nature conservation or built heritage interests

Ecological surveys are currently being carried out and will accompany the full planning application. The proposed site is not located within any of the 'sensitive areas' identified in Regulation 2(2) of the EIA Regulation.

As things stand, the subject site is of relatively poor quality in relation to biodiversity. To this regard, enhancement of the lands will be considered as part of the overall solar farm proposal.

Native species trees shall be used as standard or woodland trees within the site when new planting is needed. The planting scheme shall be marked and listed in drawings. ABO Energy will also incorporate features such as bird boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog refuges and bat boxes into the site.

Noise Impact

Noise impacts from Ballyleagry Solar Farm will be assessed against the most up-to-date noise standards - British Standard BS4142:2019 "Methods for rating and assessing industrial and commercial sound".

Background noise level measurements have already been undertaken at Ballyleagry Road, at 2 locations representative of the rural dwellings in proximity to the proposed solar farm. Noise modelling will be undertaken to determine the most appropriate plant specification and layout to ensure that noise limits are achieved at all dwellings.

Minimising potential noise impact is a central consideration for ABO Energy when designing the site layout and ensuring adequate separation distances from properties.

Grid Connection

ABO Energy has assessed the local NIE Networks infrastructure to inform an indicative grid connection route for the proposed solar farm.

A grid connection application will be submitted to NIE Networks for the project in due course. NIE Networks will then define the final grid connection route and method in a grid connection offer. For this reason, the proposed grid connection that will be assessed by ABO Energy should best represent the most feasible and likely route NIE Networks would pursue, in our professional judgment.

The indicative route consists solely of underground cable from the Ballyleagry Solar Farm substation to the existing Limavady Main substation location. All works will be conducted within the public road in line with NIE Networks' best practice requirements.

Local natural resources, such as air quality, water quality or quantity

The proposal will have no impact upon air or water quality or quantity. An outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (oCEMP) will be submitted with a future planning application setting out pollution prevention measures to protect ground water and the water environment on site during the construction phase of the development.

A drainage assessment is being prepared and will accompany the planning application.

