

## 5.0 PLANNING AND POLICY

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the national, regional and local land use planning policy context for the proposed development. The development is reviewed in the context of the following

- Planning History of the Site
- National Development Plan, 2007-2013
- National Spatial Strategy, 2002-2013
- Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland, 2007
- Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, 2004-2010
- Offaly County Development Plan, 2009-2015

### 5.2 PLANNING HISTORY OF THE SITE

As discussed in Chapter 2, Project Description, the ESB operated a peat fired power plant at the site between 1957 and 2001, which was decommissioned by 2004. The ESB subsequently applied for and received planning permission in 2004 from Offaly County Council for a 100MW simple cycle gas turbine power plant at the site. The ESB decided not to pursue plans to redevelop the site due to deregulation and other changes in the electricity supply market in Ireland. The following is a list of planning applications lodged by the ESB between 1986 to present with Offaly County Council associated with the previous peat fired power station at Lumcloon. It should be noted that the proposed development site is only part (11 acres in the northern area) of the former site which operated by the ESB as a power generation facility.

Planning Ref	Lodged Dated by ESB	Decision
86240	14/05/1986	Conditional
91330	01/10/1991	Conditional
98521	30/06/1998	Conditional
99759	06/07/1999	Conditional
03802	31/07/2003	Conditional
031196	14/11/2003	Incomplete Application
031281	03/12/2003	Conditional
081028	09/12/2008	Conditional

The above planning applications relate to alterations works to the former ESB power generation plant during its operation and post decommissioning.

In 2003 it was publically announced that Combined Energy Technology (CET), a waste disposal company, planned to apply for planning permission to construct a waste incineration facility at the site in Lumcloon. CET proposed to process meat and bonemeal produced in Ireland at the facility. Following strong local public opposition to the project, the developers decided not to proceed with the project and the planning application was withdrawn.

Conditional planning permission was also granted by Offaly County Council to Lumcloon Partnership on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008 (Planning Ref. 071732) for the construction of six industrial warehouse units, refurbishment of one existing building and associated development to comprise an enterprise park. This site adjoins the Lumcloon Energy site to the south and is 7.7 hectares in area. Construction of this development had not commenced at the time of lodging this application.

The proposed development by Lumcloon Energy continues the tradition of power generation at the site and it should be noted that the proposed plant has a significantly smaller footprint, is a more efficient power plant and will have a significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy produced when compared with the former peat fired power plant.

## 5.3 RELEVANT PLANS AND POLICY

### 5.3.1 National Development Plan, 2007-2013

The Energy Programme of the National Development Plan 2007-2013, encompasses approximately €8.5 billion in investment in energy over the period of the Plan. It is stated in the plan that the overall strategic objective of the Energy Programme is to ensure security of energy supply nationally and regionally, which is competitively priced, in the long term while meeting a high level of environmental standards.

The NDP highlights that the population of all of the eight Regional Authority areas of the State is growing and at rates higher than for the previous inter-censal period. The greatest increases (% annual growth rates) took place in the Mid-East Region (3.6%), the Midlands Region (2.8%), the South-East Region (2.1%), the West Region (2.1%) and the Border Region (2%). With a predicted growth in population the country will therefore require additional energy infrastructure to meet the predicted increase in demand.

### 5.3.2 National Spatial Strategy, 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a twenty year national planning framework for Ireland. The NSS aims to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland, supported by more effective planning. While the 2000-2006 National Development Plan identified Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford as existing gateways, the NSS designated four new national level gateways including the midland towns of Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar. The current NDP (2007-2013) is aligned with NSS policies which prioritise and encourage more balanced regional development.

The NSS recognises the liberalisation of the electricity market in Ireland, which permits new generation plants, which may not be owned by the ESB, to connect to the electricity network. The NSS outlines that there is investment and improvement opportunity for power generation plant in the midlands near existing transmission infrastructure. The Strategy also states that 'the critical mass of the Midlands and its pull factors will need reinforcement to support indigenous growth and attract investment'.

As outlined by Eirgrid in their Grid Development Strategy, Grid 25, government policy and high probability areas for locating future conventional generation include brownfield sites and sites close to the gas network.

### 5.3.3 Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland, 2007

In March 2007, the government published an Energy Policy White Paper entitled *Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland*, as a comprehensive action-based energy policy framework covering the period to 2020. It contains over 200 actions focused on delivering a range of strategic goals to underpin the sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness of the Irish energy sector and on driving delivery with integrated structures and strong policy capabilities. The Government's energy policy and climate change goals are also closely aligned and are reflected in the Climate Change Strategy.

The Government's primary policy objective is *'to ensure that energy is consistently available at competitive prices with minimal risk of supply disruption'*. This Energy Policy White Paper outlines the following strategic goals to underpin the government's overriding objective:

- Ensuring that electricity supply consistently meets demand
- Ensuring the physical security and reliability of gas supplies to Ireland
- Enhancing the diversity of fuels used for power generation

- Delivering electricity and gas to homes and businesses over efficient, reliable and secure networks
- Creating a stable attractive environment for hydrocarbon exploration and production
- Being prepared for energy supply disruptions

In recent years, new generation capacity being added to the system primarily comprises gas fired combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) plant and wind powered generation plant. The capacity credit of wind is relatively low by comparison with conventional plant and declines as wind penetration increases. The capacity credit of a generation unit is defined by Eirgrid as *'a measure of its contribution towards generation adequacy'* (i.e. maintaining the demand supply balance). The government has committed to a renewable electricity target of 40% wind generation plant penetration by 2020. However as more wind power generation plants are added to the system the risk to a secure, competitive and reliable energy supply increases. This is due to the fact that the capacity credit of wind generation plant is limited because of variable meteorological conditions (produces approximately 35% of that which might be expected under perfect wind conditions). Additionally, although geographically distinct, wind generation plant output is linked as it is often the case that common wind conditions exist across the country. Therefore increased wind generation penetration does not correspondingly result in increased output /capacity. Therefore, it is essential in a regime of greater variability, that new flexible, reliable and reactive (can start up and stop rapidly) conventional generation plants are installed to maintain a secure and competitive energy supply. The proposed Lumcloon plant is designed to meet the generation needs as required by the transmission operator and ensure that Ireland can meet its renewable targets and the government's primary energy policy objective, as outlined in the Energy Policy White Paper.

#### 5.3.4 Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, 2004-2010

Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG) by the Regional Authorities, setting the strategic policy agenda for Local Authority development plans at city and county level. Regional Guidelines are prepared as a framework to ensure good alignment between public investment plans at national level and physical planning at regional and local levels.

The Midland Regional Authority (MRA) has commenced the review of the current Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2004 – 2010 and the preparation of revised Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2016. The review commenced on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009. In their Issues Paper for the Midland Region RPGs, 2010-2022, the MRA states that *'the successful development of the Midland Region requires the availability of adequate sources of energy at affordable cost'*. The MRA also say that *'electricity is the main energy*

*demand in the Midland Region. An efficient, reliable and cost effective electricity supply is a key resource for regional development’.*

In their strategy document (*Grid 25*) for the Development of Ireland’s Electricity Grid for a Sustainable and Competitive Future, Eirgrid predicts that the demand for electricity in the Midlands region will grow by over 40% by 2025 and the region is expected to have up to 160MW of wind energy capacity. As such, Eirgrid propose to invest an additional €310m in the midlands region upgrading the transmission network and new circuit build. Eirgrid state that this *‘reinforcement is necessary to cater for the continued demand growth in the gateway towns of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore’.* Upgrading the network will also facilitate power flows from both conventional and renewable sources. The proposed plant at Lumcloon will provide a secure and reliable source of electricity in a region where Eirgrid are predicting a substantial growth in demand.

### 5.3.5 Offaly County Development Plan, 2009-2015

The Offaly County Development Plan, 2009-2015 acknowledges that County Offaly has a long tradition of power generation. In consideration of this, the Plan states that it is Council policy *‘to facilitate the continuance of power generation stations within the county’.*

It is an objective of the Council *‘to support and facilitate the generation of electrical power within the county and the provision of high-voltage electricity infrastructure to cater for natural growth, new and existing large customers’.* Furthermore, the plan states that *‘it is an objective of Offaly Council to ensure, insofar as is possible, that the necessary infrastructure is in place to support the existing and future economy in Offaly, to support economic development and to attract investment’.*

The Plan also states that there are *plans for improvements in electrical infrastructure at Banagher and Lumcloon.* Improvement works to the existing transmission lines at the site in Lumcloon were commenced by the ESB in June 2009.

In Chapter 6, Employment Economy and Enterprise, of the Plan, it states that *‘it is Council policy to actively encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites for enterprise and employment creation throughout the county, in particular, disused sites which were formerly ESB plants and Bord na Mona works’.*

Chapter 20 of the County Development Plan discusses Council policy in relation to regeneration and renewal including reuse of derelict sites. The Plan expresses that it is Council policy to seek to encourage the redevelopment of sites (brownfield) as an alternative to building on new undeveloped sites.

## 5.4 SUMMARY

The proposed development is compliant with National, Regional and Local policy for proposed gas power generation development at Lumcloon, Co Offaly. The abovementioned policy documents are supportive of the development of efficient, flexible power generation plant on sites which are close to the gas and electricity networks, have a history of power generation and have the necessary service infrastructure to support the existence of the development.