



# Planning and Environmental Statement

Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension (amendment application)

05/12/2025



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Contents

1. Introduction ..... 5

2. Site Description ..... 7

3. The Proposal..... 8

4. Planning Policy and Considerations..... 10

5. Planning Merit ..... 12

6. Conclusion ..... 19



# 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning and Environment Statement forms part of an amendment planning application submitted to Galway County Council as Planning Authority on behalf of Ballydonagh Solar Limited for minor modifications to the permitted solar PV energy development granted under Planning Reference 24/61749 (granted 08/07/2025) on lands at Ballydonagh, Cloonineen, Skecoor, Lisheenaguil and Kiltormer East, County Galway.

## Background

- 1.2. The Application Site was confirmed as an appropriate location for solar energy development in July 2025 when Galway County Council granted permission under Planning Reference 24/61749.
- 1.3. Planning Permission was granted following a full planning and environmental assessment. The consented scheme includes ground mounted solar PV panels on metal support structures, electrical transformer and inverter substation modules, temporary construction compounds, internal access tracks (existing, upgraded and new), site accesses, watercourse crossing infrastructure, security fencing, underground cabling and ducting, interconnection cabling, CCTV infrastructure, drainage measures, landscaping and habitat enhancement, together with all associated site development works. The solar farm was approved for an operational period of 35 years and was accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement.
- 1.4. The site and its wider context remain unchanged from that assessed during the determination of extant permission. The environmental, visual and technical baseline remains valid. The findings and conclusions of the original assessments therefore continue to apply for the purposes of this amendment application.
- 1.5. In this regard, the purpose of this amendment application is to secure approval for a series of limited design and operational refinements that have arisen through detailed design requirements of the consented scheme. In summary, the proposed amendments comprise;
- Combined central inverters and MV transformers are replaced by separate string inverters and central MV transformers which results in a , a reduction in the extent of associated hardstanding areas;
  - Alteration to Condition 3(a) to extend the operational lifetime of the solar farm from 35 years to 40 years, reflecting the design life of the updated technology and contemporary industry practice for solar developments.
  - Addition of tables in the former central inverter locations

1.6. It is considered that these alterations are modest in nature and do not alter the overall footprint, scale or character of the consented solar farm. The principle of solar energy development at this location has already been accepted and the proposed refinements simply optimise the design approach and operational period of the permitted scheme while remaining consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

- Planning Documents
  - Press Advert
  - Site Notice
  - Landowner Consent Letters
- Volume 1
  - Natura Impact Statement (updated)
- Volume 2
  - Infrastructural Drawings
- Volume 3
  - Technical Appraisals
    - TA2: Ecological Appraisal
      - Appendix 2D: Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP)
  - TA7: Assessment of Acoustic Impact

## 2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1. The Proposed Amendment is located in the townlands of Ballydonagh, Cloonineen, Skecoor, Kiltormer East and Lisheenaguil within a relatively rural setting, approximately 11km south/southwest of Ballinasloe, 15.5km west of Portumna, 17km west/northwest of Banagher and 20km east of Loughrea. Comprising 26 fields of agricultural land primarily used for pastoral farming and bound by trees, hedgerows and post-and-wire fencing. The site lies at an elevation of approximately 65.7-86m AOD and covers a total area of c. 56.2 hectares across 4 sections of land. The centre point of the development can be found at approximate Irish National Grid Reference (ITM) X 583053 Y 718841.
- 2.2. Access to the northwest section will be gained from the L4322 and access to the southwest and both southeast sections will be from an unnamed road that connects to the L8716.

### Planning History

- 2.3. A review of Galway County Council's on-line planning records reveals that the planning history in the area relates primarily to established residential development located along the rural, road network, consisting mainly of one-off houses and agricultural related development.
- 2.4. It should be noted that planning permission granted for the main Ballydonagh Solar Farm under Planning Reference; 2361049 on the 7/10/2024.
- 2.5. A further application was consented under Planning Reference 24/61749 on 08/07/2025 for the Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension.

### Surrounding Context

- 2.6. The surrounding context is predominately agriculture with pockets of forestry and peatland and punctuated by individual properties, farmsteads and ribbon development associated with the minor and regional road network. Fields are typically small to medium in scale and similar in character to the Application Site lands.
- 2.7. Settlements within the study area include Kiltormer, a small-town village circa 805m to the northwest, and Laurencetown situated c. 3.7km east of the Proposed Development.
- 2.8. The local population are well served by a mix of national to local graded roads throughout the study area, including the M6, N65, R355, L8716, L4322 and other named and unnamed local roads.

### 3. THE PROPOSAL

3.1. The Proposed Development will consist of an amendment to previously approved planning permission ref 24/61749 comprising the following;

- Combined central inverters and MV transformers are replaced by separate string inverters and central MV transformers which results in and a reduction in the extent of associated hardstanding areas; and
- Alteration to Condition 3(a) to extend the operational lifetime of the solar farm from 35 years to 40 years, reflecting the design life of the updated technology and contemporary industry practice for solar developments.
- Addition of tables in the former central inverter locations

3.2. By way of background, the solar panels and main infrastructure continue to occupy 26 fields across the Application Site. Please refer to **Figure 4, Volume 2** for the overall layout and **Figure 3, Volume 2** for the field numbers.

3.3. The extant permission can be summarised as follows:

- Solar arrays and metal support structures or concrete ballast foundations;
- 7 No. Inverter Substations;
- 7 No. Inverter Substation Hardstanding Areas;
- Security fencing incorporating timber posts and deer fencing;
- 112 No. small infra-red lighting and CCTV camera units;
- Entrances and tracks;
- Watercourse crossing;
- Temporary construction compounds;
- Cable trenching and backfilling; and
- Structural landscape planting and ecological enhancement measures;

3.4. Given the limited scope of the amendments now proposed, no new environmental effects arise beyond those already assessed and accepted under Planning Reference 24/61749. The extension of the operational period from 35 years to 40 years and the substitution of the central inverter arrangement with a string inverter and central transformer solution do not



significantly alter the scale or nature of the permitted development. The mitigation measures, ecological safeguards and technical conclusions set out in the updated technical assessments including; Ecological Impact Assessment, updated Natura Impact Statement and Acoustic Impact Assessment.

- 3.5. The amended design represents a modest refinement of the permitted scheme, arising from detailed design development and updated technology. The revised layout remains fully within the established development envelope and does not alter the overall footprint or environmental characteristics of the consented solar farm.
- 3.6. It should be noted that with all solar technology, PV systems continue to evolve and improve in efficiency. While details are set out in this amendment application, it is anticipated that the final infrastructure specifications will reflect the most efficient and commercially available technology at the time of construction. Any variations in configuration including adjustments to panel spacing angles or equipment arrangement will remain within the overall development envelope established by the extant permission and will not give rise to any materially different environmental or planning effects. To ensure Council approval of the final detailed design layout and elevations of non-substantive elements prior to construction, the applicant proposes the following pre-commencement condition:

*“Prior to commencement of the development, full details of the final locations, design and materials to be used for the solar arrays, string inverters and central transformer shall be submitted to the local planning authority for agreement in writing.”*

## 4. PLANNING POLICY AND CONSIDERATIONS

### National and legislative framework

- 4.1. The principle of solar energy development at the application site has already been established through the grant of permission under Planning Reference 24/61749 in July 2025. This amendment application does not revisit the acceptability of the development but instead seeks approval for a small number of internal design refinements (as set out above) and the extension of the operational lifespan from 35 to 40 years, as outlined in Section 3 of this Statement.
- 4.2. The national planning and legislative context relevant to the assessment of the original application remains unchanged. National policy continues to prioritise increased renewable energy generation, security of energy supply, decarbonisation and the delivery of utility-scale solar infrastructure. There have been no changes to national policy that would alter the acceptability of the permitted development or the minor refinements now proposed.
- 4.3. While recent updates to the Planning and Development Act and the ongoing transposition of elements of the revised Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) provide strengthened support for renewable energy development, these changes do not materially affect the assessment of this amendment application. The Proposed Amendment remains consistent with the overarching legislative and policy direction that seeks to facilitate and accelerate renewable energy delivery.
- 4.4. National policy continues to emphasise the need for renewable energy projects to contribute to climate targets, diversify the energy mix and enhance resilience within the energy system. The extension of the operational lifespan from 35 to 40 years aligns with this strategic policy direction by enabling a permitted solar farm to operate for its full technical and economic life.
- 4.5. In this context, the Proposed Amendment fully aligns with the established national policy framework supporting solar energy development. The refinement of the inverter configuration and the operational period extension do not introduce any new planning considerations and remain wholly within the envelope and intent of the original consent.

### Local Policy Context

- 4.6. At county level, the applicable planning policy framework remains the Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028, which continues to provide clear and robust support for appropriately located renewable energy development. The strategic objectives relating to climate action, renewable energy generation, rural economic support and landscape protection have not changed since the granting of permission under 24/61749.
- 4.7. Given the limited scope of the proposed amendments, and the absence of any changes to the local policy framework, there is no requirement to reassess the broader policy position

previously considered by the Planning Authority. The development continues to comply with the relevant provisions of the County Development Plan, and the minor refinements proposed do not give rise to any additional or different policy considerations.

- 4.8. The Proposed Amendment therefore remains fully aligned with national and local policy support for renewable energy generation and continues to represent proper planning and sustainable development in County Galway.

## 5. PLANNING MERIT

- 5.1. This Section of the Statement will seek to evaluate the Planning Merit and potential impacts associated with the Proposed Extension by looking at the key planning considerations on an individual basis below and establishing how they align with relevant planning policy contained within the Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028.

### Principle of Development

- 5.2. The Principle of Development has already established the acceptability of a solar farm at this location through the grant of permission under Planning Reference 24/61749. The principle of development was fully assessed and accepted, with the Planning Authority determining that the permitted solar farm accords with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. This amendment application does not alter that position. It instead seeks approval for a small number of internal design refinements and for the extension of the operational life of the permitted scheme. These refinements do not change the nature, scale, footprint or environmental effects of the development as originally permitted.

### Condition No. 3(a)

- 5.3. Through this amendment application, the applicant seeks to extend the operational lifespan of the solar farm from 35 years to 40 years. This reflects the design life of modern solar infrastructure and ensures that the permitted scheme can operate in line with contemporary industry standards. The extension does not alter the permitted development envelope or raise any environmental or amenity considerations assessed under the original application.
- 5.4. A 40-year operational period is consistent with current solar technology and aligns with normal expectations for solar PV projects. Extending the operational life does not generate any additional or different effects and does not conflict with any aspect of the original assessment. It simply allows the established and permitted scheme to operate for its full efficient lifetime. On this basis, it is appropriate that Condition 3(a) be amended to specify an operational period of 40 years as part of any future decision.

### Natura Impact Statement

- 5.5. An updated Stage 2 Natura Impact Statement accompanies this amendment application. The assessment applies a 15 kilometre study area and identifies the main pathways of ecological and hydrological connectivity between the site and relevant European sites. The NIS confirms that there is potential ecological connectivity with the River Shannon Callows SAC, limited hydrological connectivity with the Lough Derg North East Shore SAC via the Ardultagh Stream, and potential ornithological connectivity with the River Suck Callows SPA, the River Little

Brosna Callows SPA and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA. A limited hydrological pathway to the Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA is also noted.

- 5.6. In response to these potential pathways, the design and construction methodology for the permitted development already incorporates robust mitigation and avoidance measures, including surface water controls, habitat protection measures and ecological safeguards. As the amendments now proposed are internal design refinements and an extension to the operational period, they do not alter the nature of the permitted works or introduce any new source pathway receptor links. The updated NIS confirms that baseline conditions on the site have not materially changed since the earlier surveys and that the same European sites remain relevant for the purposes of this assessment.
- 5.7. On this basis, the updated NIS confirms that, with mitigation in place, the proposed amendment will not give rise to any significant effects on the qualifying interests or conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 site, and the integrity of the relevant European sites will not be affected.

## Landscape and Visual Impact

- 5.8. The original application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment which assessed the potential landscape and visual effects of the permitted solar farm within a 5 km study area. The LVIA established the baseline landscape context, the relevant Landscape Character Types and Units, and the likely effects of the permitted development during construction, operation and decommissioning.
- 5.9. The landscape within the study area is classified under the Galway Landscape Character Assessment as part of the Central Galway Complex Landscape Character Type. The assessment identifies landscape value, sensitivity and capacity to accommodate change. The permitted development was found to sit within an agricultural and enclosed landscape setting with existing hedgerows, treelines and landform providing a strong degree of visual containment.
- 5.10. The Application Site and most of the surrounding study area fall within the Central Galway Complex Landscape Character Type. The LVIA concluded that the permitted development would result in a localised change to landscape character within the site boundary but that effects would diminish rapidly with distance due to the low-lying nature of the panels, existing vegetation and the wider agricultural landscape structure.
- 5.11. In relation to landscape effects, the LVIA submitted as part of the extant application confirms that the permitted development would introduce a renewable energy feature into a small proportion of the receiving landscape, giving rise to slight to moderate adverse effects within the site and immediate surroundings, reducing to minor or not significant across the wider Landscape Character Type as views become contained and screened.
- 5.12. With regard to visual impact, the LVIA confirms that the highest effects occur within approximately 250m of the site where open or partial views exist. Beyond this, visibility

reduces significantly due to existing hedgerows, topography and vegetation. At greater distances of around 500 metres and beyond, effects reduce to low or negligible and are not significant. In long distance views, the development becomes absorbed within the wider agricultural landscape pattern and mitigation planting further reduces visibility as it matures.

- 5.13. The case officer report for the extant permission accepted the findings of the LVIA and confirmed that the proposed development would not unduly impact the receiving landscape.
- 5.14. The current amendment application does not introduce any new above ground structures or any changes that would alter the visual form, scale or extent of the consented solar farm. The amendments relate to updated inverter technology, addition of tables in the former central inverter locations and a correction to the operational period. These changes do not alter the visual perception of the development nor do they introduce any new landscape or visual effects. On this basis, the conclusions of the accepted LVIA remain fully applicable and continue to be relevant in the assessment of this amendment application.

## Ecological Appraisal

- 5.15. An Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) had previously been undertaken for the consented Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension and has now been updated to consider the Proposed Amendment. The updated EclA provides a full assessment of the potential for the amended design to affect the integrity of European sites within 15km of the Application Site, having regard to their conservation objectives and their ecological structure and function. It also assesses if the Proposed Amendment would have any significant effects for local wildlife.
- 5.16. An updated Fossitt Habitat survey was undertaken in October and November 2025 which was in accordance with Fossitt habitat survey guidance. The number of onsite habitats identified remained the same as the previous surveys.
- 5.17. The updated assessment confirms that baseline conditions on the site have not materially changed since the earlier surveys and that the same European sites remain relevant for consideration.
- 5.18. In addition to the SPA's and SAC's which are mentioned in the NIS section above, there are also three Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and one proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) located within 5km of the Application Site. When considering the terrestrial nature of the sites, no connectivity exists. In conclusions, the Proposed Amendment will have no adverse effects on any of the features of the identified pNHA and the three NHAs.
- 5.19. It was found that baseline conditions had not deviated significantly from previous conducted in 2023 and 2024; therefore, further surveys recommended as part of the relevant mitigation measures are provided within the EclA and have not been altered specifically.
- 5.20. It is considered that the short-term disturbance from the Proposed Amendment **will not be significant on any ecological features** if the best practice and recommended mitigation are

implemented. With the implementation of the Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP), **the potential of the site to support local wildlife will increase.**

## Archaeology and Architectural Heritage

- 5.21. The Archaeology and Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment submitted with the original application provides a detailed evaluation of potential direct and indirect effects on cultural heritage assets and archaeological remains within the 2 and 5 kilometre study areas. This includes consideration of National Monuments in State Care, Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Protected Structures, sites listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and recorded archaeological sites.
- 5.22. Within the 5 kilometre study area, nine Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes were identified, while the 2 kilometre study area contains 8 sites listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and 138 sites recorded in the Record of Monuments and Places, including some redundant entries.
- 5.23. The AAHIA confirms that 4 recorded heritage assets lie within or directly adjacent to the application boundary. No features of archaeological significance were identified during site walkover survey or desk-based assessment. Although the site is assessed as having moderate potential for below ground remains based on the wider archaeological landscape, the geophysical survey identified only a small number of anomalies with possible archaeological character. As a precautionary approach, the AAHIA recommended an overall programme of archaeological test trenching prior to construction, which is already secured through existing planning conditions.
- 5.24. In terms of indirect effects, the AAHIA concludes that any potential visual or setting effects on surrounding heritage assets are low and do not require additional mitigation. The report confirms that the permitted solar farm will not result in significant adverse effects on the integrity, appreciation or understanding of any designated heritage asset.
- 5.25. As the current amendment application is minor in nature, does not expand the development footprint and does not significantly change the nature, height or extent of the permitted works, there is no potential for additional or different archaeological or heritage effects. The conclusions of the accepted AAHIA therefore remain fully applicable to the assessment of this amendment application.
- 5.26. It should be noted that condition no. 11 of the permission sets out the archaeology requirements for the development. It requires that a suitably qualified and licensed archaeologist carry out pre-development archaeological testing in all areas of potential archaeology and all ground disturbance locations. A final archaeological impact assessment report must be submitted and agreed before any site preparation or construction works begin. In this regard, the further information submitted for the extant permission addressed the requirements of the archaeological condition in full through a licensed programme of trenching and targeted testing, supported by an updated Archaeological Impact Assessment

and additional cartographic review. This work enabled the Planning Authority to fully assess the archaeological baseline of the site, confirm that no significant features were present, and set out the appropriate pre-development archaeological requirements to be applied to the consented scheme.

- 5.27. The condition also requires archaeological monitoring of all remaining site clearance and groundworks, with works paused if previously unknown features are identified. A final archaeological report must be submitted on completion of all works, ensuring full compliance with archaeological protection requirements.

## Access to the Site

- 5.28. The Proposed Amendment does not alter the access arrangements previously assessed and accepted by the Planning Authority. As confirmed in the case officer report, access to the northwest portion of the site is taken from the L4322 to the north, with the southeast and southwest sections accessed from the local road connecting to the L8716 approximately 1 km to the east northeast. The original application was accompanied by a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) outlining site access, internal tracks, haul routes, delivery volumes, and construction traffic management measures. No abnormal loads were required and that the Roads Department reviewed the CTMP and recommended standard conditions to ensure the safe management of construction traffic.
- 5.29. The current amendment does not introduce any new access points, does not alter haul routes, and does not increase construction or operational traffic. The minor internal layout refinements now proposed remain fully within the parameters of the accepted CTMP.

## Flood Risk

- 5.30. The original application was supported by a detailed Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment which established the baseline hydrological conditions of the site and identified limited areas of Flood Zones A and B associated with the Ardultagh Watercourse, with the majority of the site lying within Flood Zone C.
- 5.31. The assessment confirmed that only water compatible infrastructure was located within areas mapped as Flood Zone A and B, that solar panels set a minimum of 0.8 metres above ground level would remain above predicted flood depths, and that a sustainable drainage system using filter drains and soakaways would effectively manage surface water on site.
- 5.32. The case officer report accepted these findings in full, noting that the FRA and DIA demonstrated the development would not increase flood risk during construction, operation or decommissioning and concluding that the proposal was acceptable from a flood risk perspective. As the current amendment does not alter the permitted layout in any significant way that would affect flood risk or drainage, the conclusions of the accepted FRA and DIA remain valid and continue to apply to this amendment application.



## Glint and Glare

- 5.33. The original application was supported by a comprehensive Glint and Glare Assessment which examined potential solar reflections affecting residential receptors, road users, rail infrastructure and aviation assets within a 1 km ground receptor study area and a 30 km aviation study area. The assessment confirmed, following visibility analysis and application of mitigation planting set out in the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP), that all impacts would reduce to **none**. The case officer report noted that 21 residential and 11 road receptors were dismissed at the outset as they lay within no reflection zones, and confirmed that no impacts were predicted for rail, pilots or aviation infrastructure. The Planning Authority concluded that the submitted assessment was satisfactory and that effects would be negligible once mitigation was in place.
- 5.34. As the current amendment does not alter panel locations, panel heights, site boundaries, receptor positions or the overall layout in a way that introduces new reflection paths, the conclusions of the accepted Glint and Glare Assessment remain valid. The minor internal design refinements, including the replacement of central inverters with a string inverter solution, have no bearing on the G&G assessment.

## Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (OCEMP)

- 5.35. The Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan submitted with the extant permission established the framework for construction phase environmental controls, including archaeological and cultural heritage safeguards, and was fully assessed and accepted by the Planning Authority.
- 5.36. The Proposed Amendment does not introduce any significant additional ground disturbance, does not alter the permitted footprint, and does not modify the nature or depth of excavation previously evaluated. The applicant acknowledges that, in accordance with Condition 11(ix), the final CEMP will identify all archaeological and cultural heritage constraints as confirmed in the final archaeological impact assessment and will provide monitoring and mitigation measures to be applied during site preparation and construction.

## Acoustic

- 5.37. An Acoustic Impact Assessment had previously been undertaken for the consented Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension and has now been updated to consider the Proposed Amendment. The report provides an acoustic assessment of the amended site layout of the consented Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension (Planning Ref: 24/61749) in terms of operational and construction impacts. It also considered a cumulative setting with the neighbouring revised Ballydonagh Solar farm.
- 5.38.

- 5.39. The conclusion remains the same as the consented Ballydonagh Solar Farm Extension in that the results show that overall predicted sound levels, individually and cumulatively, will meet proposed daytime, evening and night-time limits determined from relevant guidance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1. The Proposed Amendment is limited in scope and relates solely to the replacement of the central inverter and MV transformer arrangement with string inverters and MV transformer, a small reduction in associated hardstanding areas, addition of tables in the former central inverter locations and the correction of Condition 3(a) to allow a 40 year operational period. These refinements do not alter the permitted development envelope, introduce no new infrastructure of visual significance and do not change the nature or extent of the originally permitted solar farm.
- 6.2. The technical review undertaken confirms that these minor internal layout adjustments do not give rise to any new or different environmental, landscape, traffic, heritage, ecological or hydrological effects beyond those already assessed and accepted as part of the original permission. All previously approved mitigation and management measures remain fully applicable and ensure that the development continues to operate within the parameters established under the parent consent.
- 6.3. The extension of the operational life to 40 years reflects standard industry practice for contemporary solar infrastructure and ensures that the permitted scheme can operate for its full technical and economic lifespan. As the amendment introduces no adverse effects and preserves the overall form, scale and benefits of the permitted development, it remains fully aligned with the national, regional and local policy support for renewable energy.



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