

Lines of Communication

**Our New Approach to
Consultation - Have Your Say**



The current. The future.



Who are EirGrid - and what do we do?

EirGrid is responsible for a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity: Now and in the future.

We develop, manage and operate the electricity transmission grid. This brings power from where it is generated to where it is needed – throughout Ireland. We use our grid to supply power to industry and businesses that use large amounts of electricity. Our grid also powers the distribution network. This supplies the electricity you use everyday in your homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, and farms.

We develop new electricity infrastructure only when required. EirGrid is a state-owned company, but we answer to government and to regulators. We work for the benefit and safety of every citizen in Ireland; we abide by strict laws and safety standards.

What is this guide for?

Following a review of our public consultation, we made a commitment to improve the way we engage with the public and stakeholders.

This publication is a draft summary of our proposed new consultation process.

We are publishing it to get feedback from the public and from our stakeholders. We will consider all feedback received, and this will inform the final document.

We are committed to engaging with you about our future plans. We believe we have a responsibility to provide you with information about our business and our plans. This means we try to be as proactive, honest and transparent as possible.

We publish all consultations on our web site, to allow all stakeholders the opportunity to comment openly. We have also changed our approach to ensure we engage with communities and stakeholders earlier than ever before.

We want to hear from people who our projects may affect - or anybody who may have concerns about our plans.

The more we talk with you, the better we can respond. You have the local knowledge that can improve our projects, and we want to find ways to minimise any disruption to your life or work.

This guide is a summary of how we do consult with the public about our projects. It explains why we develop the grid, and the standards we aim for when we do so. It explains how we engage with people to get feedback on our plans. In short, this guide tells you what to expect from us, and what we would like from you.

When we work together, we can create a stronger and better electricity grid with the least possible impact on you and your community.

Our Role

EirGrid's role is to operate a safe, reliable, economic and efficient electricity transmission system. To achieve this across the island of Ireland, we must develop or upgrade grid infrastructure when and where required. This ensures you can rely on the electricity you need now, and that you can continue to rely on it in the future. We can't simply leave the grid as is – it needs regular maintenance and upgrades. Without this, we would all suffer the eventual consequence: an unreliable supply of electricity.

We do not have an interest in delivering any particular technology solution. We want to meet the needs of each project in a reliable and cost-effective way. We did not create Ireland's energy or economic policies, but we must respond to the laws and statutes created to support these policies. Finally, we do not own any electricity generation, and we don't favour any form of electricity generation over others. We plan for future energy needs, and respond to government policy that affects how and where electricity is generated and used.

Our Principles

We want to provide quality, efficient and independent electricity transmission. We do this for the benefit of everyone. We have a code of conduct that we expect all employees to follow in support of this goal.

We listened to our stakeholders about how we previously consulted on our projects. We then reviewed our approach to engagement, to improve how we involve stakeholders and the public in our decisions. This led to a new way of consulting on projects, based on three themes:

- Develop a participative approach
- Change our culture and processes
- Encourage leadership & advocacy

Our Approach

We have to make decisions about the future of the electricity transmission network. This will affect all of us. We want our decisions to be clear, and we want you to understand how you can influence those decisions. To achieve all this, we want to hear from you.

We know that many of you hold strong views on our projects, and some of you will not agree with our plans. We cannot make decisions that everyone agrees with. But we want to engage with everyone who our projects may affect, and with those who wish to make their views heard. We do this to find every possible compromise, and to make sure we minimise disruption or inconvenience.

When you engage with us, you can expect:

- We will communicate clearly with the people affected by our projects. This means providing plain English summaries of our proposals. We will make these available online, and on paper.
- We will allow enough time for you to consider the information, and to give us your views.
- We will provide consistent information. Anybody who wishes to respond will have an equal right to do so.
- We will offer well-defined opportunities for engagement. We will explain what decisions we need to make, and when. We will explain what factors affect this decision, and how you can affect this decision, where possible.
- We will let those affected know our decisions, and the reasons why we made a decision.
- We will communicate with everyone who has taken the time to engage with us. We will do so at the end of each stage, explaining the outcome and how we considered their feedback.
- Our staff will treat all interested parties, on every project, with honesty and respect. This will happen regardless of their views.

Finally, it's important to understand the time frames of our projects. Major developments to the electricity grid take years to design, develop and plan before they are ready to build. The length and scale of this work means we use a project development process. At each step, we make decisions that narrow our focus for the choices required in the following step. This means that towards the end of this process, we are looking at details rather than broader issues.

Our consultation process assumes that the need for a project remains valid throughout. It also assumes that all decisions made in previous project steps are still correct. However, we recognise that the passage of time can affect both, particularly on large-scale projects. For that reason, we carry out regular reviews of our long-term grid development strategy. If we see changes to the need, or opportunities offered by new technology, then we will update our project plans in response.

Our new approach to consultation

Who do we talk to?

The Public

When we talk about “the public” we mean members of the local community, and organisations with an interest in the project. This could be individuals, or representatives of organisations. If you live near a project area, we’ll try our best to make sure you learn about our plans, and how they might affect you.

Landowners

When we consider new infrastructure, this may impact local landowners. Regardless of whether an individual or a company owns the land, we always engage with these landowners.

The nature of our response will change depending on the project, but we always have two main goals. First, we work with landowners to minimise any disruption that our projects may cause. Second, we will ensure landowners are fairly compensated.

At the early stages of a project, we look at several locations where we may develop new infrastructure. Given this, we won’t know which landowners our plans may affect.

At this point, we engage with representative groups to make sure we hear their views. This may include organisations like the Irish Farmer’s Association or the ICMSA.

Other organisations

We work closely with local authorities and elected representatives during a major project. We may ask them to help shape our consultation, or ask for their views on our consultation plans. In a similar way, we also talk to businesses or representative organisations. This helps us to get the opinions of those with a specific interest in our plans, or on a particular issue. This can include environmental, tourist or heritage groups.

Working together

We would like your input at every stage of our work. We promise to work in a transparent and open way, and so we want to provide opportunities for you to share your views. This guide shows how we aim to engage with you, including what we do to listen to you at every step of our project. We also explain how you can make your views heard, and how your opinions can inform our decisions.

We are a state owned company, and are duty-bound to manage and develop the grid on behalf of all electricity users.

Our goal is to find an agreed outcome with anyone who our projects may impact. However, there may be some stages in a project where the focus of our engagement is to inform and to explain, rather than to discuss changes.

Similarly, at the early stages of our projects, we may initially talk to representative groups as we may not know exactly where a project will be located. But we’re always open to ideas on how we can improve our communication with you. And if we need to adapt our consultation methods to meet the needs of a particular group, we’ll do our best to achieve this.

There is one very important principle that is at the heart of our consultation process.

The earlier you get involved in our projects, the more influence you can have on them.

Even if you disagree with our plans, you have more opportunities to affect what we do when you talk to us. And the earlier you engage, the greater the potential for change.



Our new Agricultural Liaison Officers

Our consultation process

We start by asking some essential questions:

- Who may our project affect? Who may have a particular interest in our project?
- What kind of engagement plan best suits this project? What representatives can we work with to agree this plan?
- What decisions do we need to make in this project? When and how could the people and representatives we talk to influence these decisions?
- What are the best ways to involve people who our project may affect, or groups with an interest in the project?

The answers to these questions then inform the next steps:

- We find out your views, in ways that meet our values and commitments.
- As we finish each step in our project process, we consider your feedback and make a decision.
- We then publish the decision. When we do so, we make sure everyone who took part is aware of our decision – and we explain how we responded to their views.
- At each major step in a project, we pause to reflect on the points where we have reached an agreement, and where we haven’t. We learn from this to improve future steps.

How to get involved

At every stage of our projects, we will provide information on our plans, and the ways you can get involved. Our website shows all projects in an area. This will explain if there is a local office you can visit, a phone number you can call, or an email address you can use. You can also meet with one of our community or agriculture liaison officers. They work on the ground in local communities to provide information and respond to questions

Once you get in touch, we will keep you up to date with regular newsletters. At key stages in the project, we will then ask for your views so you can influence our decisions. If you’re not sure which project may affect you, just contact our community relations team.



Why we develop the transmission grid

Maintenance and Upgrades

Electricity infrastructure is long-term, large-scale investment in the future. Each piece of equipment can last for over 30 years. As the grid is an interconnected network, we have to think of the entire grid when making local changes.

Because of this, there are many reasons why we may need to improve the grid. These could include:

- replacement or upgrading of old infrastructure;
- changes to the demand for electricity from individual users, or from industries that need large amounts of energy;
- greater interconnection with other electricity grids; or
- new sources and locations of electricity generation.

Factors like these change how electricity flows through our transmission grid. To allow for these changes, we may need to reinforce the grid to maintain its performance and reliability.

EirGrid has a legal obligation to connect those who generate electricity. As the national electricity transmission system operator for Ireland, we have a statutory function. Subject to direction from the regulator, this statute requires us to offer a connection to the grid for those who request it. This means we are legally required to develop the grid in response to plans for new electricity generation, such as wind farms.

When we develop the grid, we follow three main principles:

1. We ensure that consultation with local communities is central to our network development plans;
2. We consider all practical technology options for network development;
3. We optimise the network to minimise the need for new infrastructure.

Our planning obligations

EirGrid is subject to the same planning laws as any other developer of infrastructure. We have to seek permission for projects on a project-by-project basis. Depending on the scale of a project, we will either apply to An Bord Pleanála, or to a local planning authority.

They will consider the form of our application, and the proposed development itself.

- Does our application contain the information needed to make a decision? They may ask us to come back with more details.
- Does it meet with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development?
- Does it conform to any related EU directives or policies?
- Does it meet the requirements of local or national development plans, or regional planning guidelines?
- Does it reflect the views of prescribed bodies like the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

An Bord Pleanála also requires us to notify the public of any planning application, and to hold a period of open consultation for at least 6 weeks.

Also, An Bord Pleanála may decide to hold an oral hearing at the end of the consultation period. This gives people a public forum to make their views known to the planning authority.

After this process, An Bord Pleanála will either grant or refuse permission, or grant permission subject to some changes.

How we develop projects

Many people might not take an active interest in a project until we identify a precise route. However, it is important that we gather your views before this point.

We want you to understand how and why we plan our projects, so you can give us your feedback as early as possible.

Designing an electricity transmission project is a complex and lengthy process.

Because of this, we use a consistent project planning process to explore options and make decisions. This means we follow the same steps for every project.

The decision-making tools we use, and the amount of engagement we carry out at each step, depends on the scale and complexity of each project.

For a simple project upgrading equipment on an existing site, we would only engage with those directly affected. However, for a project involving new lines or cables we would consult widely from the start.

The next ten pages explain how we develop projects, and when we need your input as part of this process.

Step 1

Is there an issue that may need grid development?

Step 2

What technologies can meet the needs of this project?

Step 3

What's the best technology choice, and what route could it take?

Step 4

Where exactly should we build?

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Step 1

Is there an issue that may need grid development?

Part of our role is to consider future changes in the demand for electricity, and in how and where electricity is generated. This helps us plan for improvements to the grid so we can meet future needs.

We base our projections on our experience, on current grid activity, and by talking to government and the wider energy industry. We also plan for future grid development in response to government policy and forecasts of economic growth.

When we identify a potential need to reinforce the grid, our first step is to confirm this need. This can happen in a number of ways: We may discuss the need with companies that generate electricity, or those that use it in large amounts. Or we may engage with representative organisations, particularly those with technical expertise. At this point, we aren't considering the detail of a solution, or where we may need to locate new infrastructure. We may consider some technical solutions at an outline level, but we will make no decisions. Given this, we generally do not seek the views of the public at this step.

However, we do publish our thinking on the future need for grid development. We discuss this topic in our grid development strategy, and in our forecast statements. We also raise this issue in our regional development forums.

As a potential need starts to become more certain, we will broaden our initial work. We may meet with elected representatives, or for issues that could result in a new project, we may set up a Reference Group. This group would have members representing those who could be affected by the need for a project, or by the potential solution.

When we have identified and confirmed a need, we then give it a name and start a formal process of project development.

At this point, the only decision is to confirm that there is a need for a grid development project. We may also short-list a number of possible technical solutions to help provide a starting point for the next step.

Step 1 At a Glance

What's happening

Confirming the need for the project, and explaining this need to local representatives and interest groups.

What can you influence?

The need for grid development is in response to energy generation and use, and government policy. You can influence government policy through your elected representatives.

What have we decided at this stage?

The need for the project, and possible technical solutions.

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Step 2

What technologies can meet the needs of this project?

In this step we will look at the technical options that can meet the need we confirmed in Step 1. As part of this process, we will inform you about the technical solutions we are proposing. We will then seek your views about these options in a public consultation. We want to understand which options you think are suitable, and which are not. We can then study your feedback, and can progress the right options to consider in more detail.

At this step, we are not considering any specific routes; we are only trying to find the best technology solution. For a complex project we might look at dozens of different possible options. For example, we may have two basic solutions, such as:

- a new connection; or
- upgrading several substations.

There are many ways we could develop each solution - so this leads to a long list of possible options. These kinds of variations could include:

- What voltage will the new connection use to carry electricity?
- Will the new connection be overhead or underground?

- Where will it join up to the existing network?
- What related upgrades will the new infrastructure need on the existing network?
- Which substations may need an upgrade? What does this mean for the lines connecting these substations?

What we need from you

At this point, we will present the options we think should go forward, and the ones that we have ruled out. We'll ask you to tell us your views on these. We will then consider your views, along with other factors, to make a decision on the best technical solutions to bring forward to the next step.

When making this decision, we aim to balance your preferences with the technical suitability of each option. This means that we may progress with options that we believe are less suitable, if they have a strong public preference. Equally, we may also progress with options that we believe are more suitable, even if they are unpopular with the public. Our goal is to complete this step with a range of technical solutions. We can then consider these in more detail when we progress to the next step.

Step 2 At a Glance

What's happening

After considering a number of technical solutions, we narrow this down to a short-list of options.

What can you influence?

You can influence the options we take forward to the next step.

We will also keep you informed about all the options, even if you don't submit an opinion on them.

What have we decided at this stage?

What technical solutions we bring forward to Step 3, and which we now rule out.

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Step 3

What's the best technology choice, and what route could it take?

This step is by far the longest and most detailed of our project development process. During this step, we study the potential benefits and impacts of the different options we could build, and where we could build them. For our largest projects, we are likely to spend over a year at this step.

What we need from you

You will be able to influence our choice of technology, and where we build the project.

When we're considering where we may build a project that involves a new line, we start by looking at what we call a "route corridor". This is a broad area within a region, rather than a specific, detailed route. We typically consider a number of corridors during this step.

Towards the end of this step, we will ask for your views on a specific technology option, and on the particular corridor that we want to progress. This consultation will help us understand what is important to you, and to learn more about the local area.

We will then ask you about the area or areas where the project could go. There may be options for sections of a route corridor, or for the preferred site of a substation. Where there are choices like this, we will collaborate with you to choose one that is preferable for both the project and the public.

As part of this process, we will provide information on all the technologies and corridors that we considered. We will also provide our opinion on their suitability: we will identify the most suitable option, and explain why others are not.

At the end of this step, we will decide on a preferred technology for the project, and on the route that the option could take.

We will base our decision on a detailed analysis of your feedback, and on a number of criteria:

- economic,
- technical,
- social, and
- environmental.

Step 3 At a Glance

What's happening

We consider technology options in more detail. We also look at the broad geographical areas we may use for possible routes or site locations. We then narrow our analysis to a preferred option.

What can you influence?

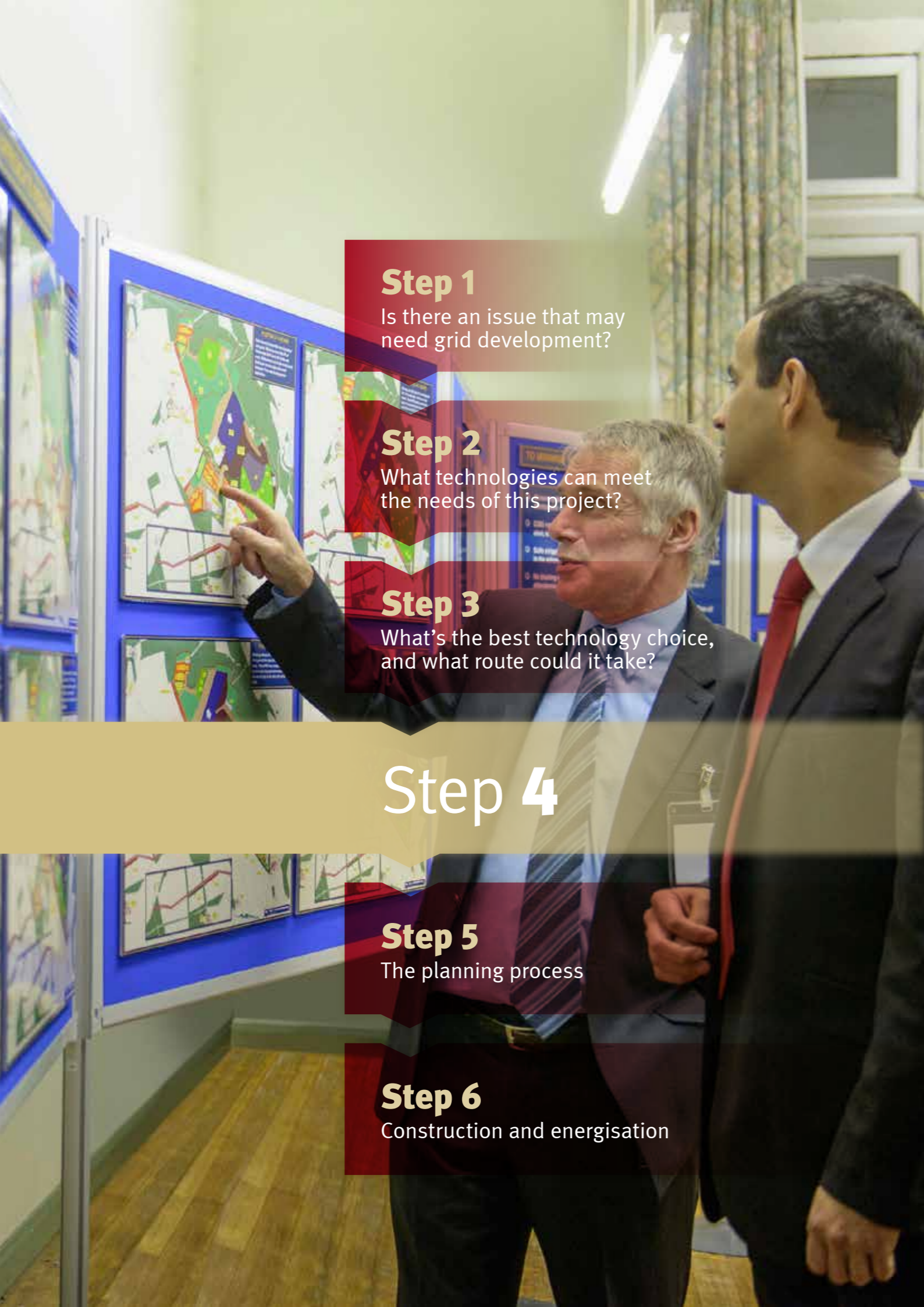
You can collaborate with us to develop the preferred route or site in local areas, where possible.

You can give your views on our preferred option and route corridors in our consultation process.

We will continue to provide information on our preferred technology option, and on the possible routes and sites for this option.

What have we decided at this stage?

Which technology option we prefer, and the broad route or general area where we could place the option.



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Where exactly should we build?

By now we have decided what technology we will be using on this project and roughly where the project will go. In this step, we will decide exactly where is the most appropriate place to develop the project. This could be either a route or a site, or both.

What we need from you

You can now make a significant influence on what exactly we build and where we build it. This is because, during this step, we work at a detailed level with local people. This is particularly the case for those our project directly affects, such as landowners. We want to understand how our project could affect you, and how we can design the project details to minimise this.

In the local area, we will now engage with landowners and the wider community to understand which locations are more preferable. We also use this process to learn more about local factors that could affect what, how and where we build. At this stage, our aim is to collaborate on an agreed design solution, once it is possible and practical.

We will consider all the information gathered in this step, including local knowledge. We will then decide on a preferred route or site to include in our planning application.

Step 4 At a Glance

What's happening

We develop a detailed route or site. This will specify the exact position of any new equipment or infrastructure.

What can you influence?

You can influence the design of the agreed solution in your local area.

We will offer choices and options on the detail of building the agreed solution.

By getting involved with our local engagement, you can give us your views on these proposals. This will influence the detail of how we build the agreed solution.

We will also keep you informed about our decisions and on the progress of the project throughout this step

What have we decided at this stage?

The precise route or site on which the project will be built.

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Step 5 The Planning Process

What's happens next?

Once we submit our planning application, the project moves to a formal application process. As well as the standard updates that we will continue to provide, we will also publish a notice in the newspaper when we lodge an application. The planning authority – either An Bord Pleanála or the local planning body – will then seek views on our application. They will ask anybody with an interest in the project to send in a written submission of their views.

Once we make our application, An Bord Pleanála may hold an oral hearing. This will give those who submitted a written opinion a chance to air their views on the project.

Where possible, we will respond to submissions from those who are directly affected by our plans. We cannot make fundamental changes to our planning application – but we can consider small adjustments if they ease your concerns.

When the planning process ends, the planning authority will issue its decision in one of three ways:

1. A decision to grant permission.
2. A decision to grant permission, subject to conditions that we must follow.
3. A decision not to grant permission.

Step 5 At a Glance

What's happening

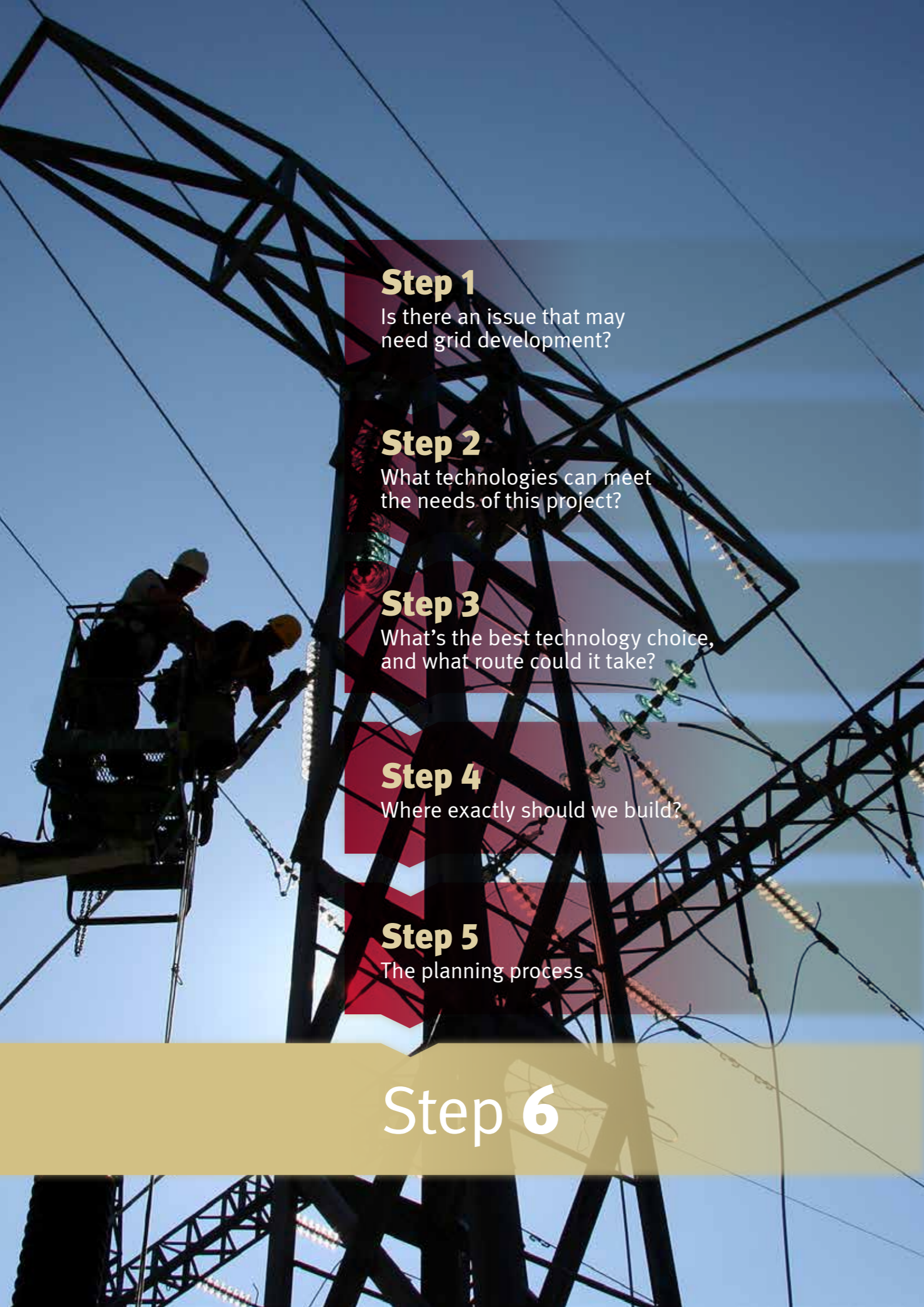
The relevant planning authority will make a legally binding decision on the project. They will either grant full permission, grant permission on the basis that we make changes, or deny planning permission.

What can you influence?

You can make a submission to the planning authority to seek changes, or to ask that they deny the project planning permission.

What is decided at this stage?

The planning authority will decide if the project has legal permission to proceed, or to proceed with changes.



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Step 6 Construction and Energisation

We are committed to engaging with you throughout the construction phase. Even after the planning authority grants us planning permission, we still engage with the people that our project may affect.

EirGrid plans for the future of the electricity grid, but it is ESB Networks that construct any new infrastructure. EirGrid and ESB Networks will then work together to minimise any impact from construction.

Our goal is that those who live or work near our projects experience as little inconvenience as possible. We will consult with these people on details like road access, or planning the schedule of works so that it has the least impact possible.

We will also inform the wider community of the progress of the project, leading up to the final process of testing and energisation.

To do this, we create a plan that provides information to landowners and communities on the details of the construction phase. This covers topics like traffic management and access requirements.

Finally, when a project has planning permission and is ready to construct, we start Proximity Payments and the Community Fund.

We make Proximity Payments to home owners who live within 200 m of new transmission infrastructure. This is to recognise any sense of visual intrusion.

We also set up a Community Fund to provide grants and supports to local organisations and other good causes in a project area.

Step 6 At a Glance

What's happening

The planning approved project is constructed and energised.

What can you influence?

EirGrid and ESB Networks will work with you to minimise disruption and inconvenience.

What have we decided at this stage?

The details of how and when we construct the planning-approved project



How do we assess our engagement?

When we're developing a new project, our goal is to have good working relationships with the people who may be affected by our work. We want to include the right people in this process, and to build honest and strong relationships from the start.

To determine whether our engagement activities on a project have been successful, we will ask you for your thoughts at the end of the process. This will help us improve our engagement.

On projects like ours, there are always different and strongly held views on what the right outcome should be. Even if you disagree with our final decision, we hope you will agree that we made that decision in a fair and open way.

That's why, when we assess the consultation process, we focus on the quality of our consultation.

For example, we may ask for your views on how well we defined the parts of a project where you could influence the project. Or, we may ask you to rate how we took account of the comments made, and what feedback we provided.

We won't over-burden you with requests for feedback when a project is complete. Instead, we work to identify the best approach to evaluation.

Based on this, each project will have its own consultation framework. We will use this to assess how we engage with you, and to ensure this matches our consultation commitments.

We will publish this framework for every project, and update it as the project progresses. This makes our final assessment of consultation as transparent as possible.

What if we don't meet your expectations?

We know that not everyone will agree with the decisions we make about new infrastructure. But we want everyone to have an equal chance to influence our projects, and to understand why we make our decisions.

If you feel that we haven't met this goal, we want to know. If you believe that we haven't met our consultation commitments, or followed the process set out in this guide, then please get in touch.

Customer Relations Team: (01) 702 6642

For other contact details, including information on how to make a complaint, please visit: www.eirgrid.com/aboutus/contactus

We'll listen to your concerns, and promise to respond to you with an update and any changes, if required.

Glossary

Assets

All substations and electricity transmission lines that form the transmission network. ESB owns the transmission network, and EirGrid operates it.

Capacity

The amount of electricity that can be safely transferred on the system or a circuit.

CER ('the regulator')

The Commission for Energy Regulation. The CER is Ireland's independent energy regulator with a range of economic, customer and safety functions.

Circuit

The overhead line or underground cable linking two substations.

Corridor

The planned route along which an electricity line or cable will be located.

Demand

The amount of electrical power that consumers take from the network. This is often expressed as 'peak demand', which is the largest amount of power used in a given period.

Demand forecasts

The amount of electricity that is predicted to be drawn from the network by energy users. The forecast is updated every year.

Distribution Network

Our high-voltage transmission network supplies power to the distribution network. This lower voltage network delivers power to households and businesses. In Ireland, the ESB owns and ESB Networks Ltd operates the distribution network.

Energy security

This is the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.

Generator

A facility that produces electricity. Generators use a variety of sources to generate power. This can include coal-fired power plants, gas fired power plants and wind farms.

Grid

A network or 'energy motorway' made up of high-voltage overhead lines and underground cables, as well as transmission stations. The network links energy users with energy creators. It is designed to ensure that power can flow freely to where it is needed.

Grid infrastructure

The physical structures which make up the transmission grid. These include the cables and lines used to transmit electricity, the pylons which hold the lines, and the substations used to convert the electrical current and raise or lower the voltage of that current.

Infrastructure

This refers to the structures and facilities of a region or country, such as buildings, roads, bridges and the electrical grid.

Interconnector

A high voltage transmission line connecting the national electricity networks of two countries.

Reinforcement

Increasing the capacity of the existing electricity transmission network. We do this by building new lines or cables, or by upgrading existing ones.

Renewable generation

The generation of electricity using renewable energy, such as wind, solar, tidal and biomass.

Stakeholder

A person, interest group or organisation that has an interest or concern in something.

Substation

A set of electrical equipment used to step high-voltage electricity down to a lower voltage. We use substations to create lower voltages to safely deliver power to small businesses and homes.

Transmission line

A high-voltage power line running at 400kV, 220kV or 110kV on the Irish transmission system. The high-voltage allows delivery of bulk power over long distances with minimal power loss.

Transmission Network or Grid

This is a network of around 6,500 km high-voltage power lines, cables and substations. It links generators of electricity to the distribution network. EirGrid operates Ireland's transmission network.

Voltage

Voltage is a measure of 'electric potential'. It is like 'pressure' in a water system

Wind power

Energy harnessed from the wind at wind farms and converted to power..



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