

East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade

Community Forum

7pm, 19th April 2023, Coolquay Lodge

- Attending (members):** Helena Merriman (St. Margaret’s Parish Hall Committee), Sheelagh Morris (St Margarets Action Committee), Liam O Gradaigh (St. Margaret’s GAA), Denis O’Leary (Kilbride Tidy Towns), Tom O’Mahony (Dunboyne Community Centre), Pat Smith (County Meath Chamber)- via Zoom, Alan Tobin (County Meath Chamber) – via Zoom, Rob Webb (Tyrrelstown Residents Community Council)
- Apologies:** Walter Moran (Dunboyne AFC), Pearse Sutton (St. Margaret’s The Ward),
Christie Elliott (Project Management Office), Jason Kenna (Project Management Office)
- Attending (EirGrid):** Grainne Duffy (Community Liaison Officer), Eoghan O’Sullivan (Community Liaison Officer, EirGrid),
- Facilitation:** Harriet Emerson
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Welcome & Agenda

Everyone was welcomed and thanked for attending and it was agreed to proceed with the draft agenda as pre-circulated. Rob kindly provided technical support to make the meeting more accessible for those participating via Zoom. Unfortunately, no Project Management Team staff were able to attend the meeting but it was agreed that they will be asked for a response to any issues that cannot be addressed by the staff attending.

Minutes of Meeting 28th March 2023

Those present approved the draft minutes of the last meeting (previously circulated) held on the 28th March 2023.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

All matters arising were agreed to be covered in the agreed agenda.

Discussion between Forum Members and EirGrid staff on the Emerging Best Performing Route Option

The EirGrid staff reported that reasonable numbers had attended the Open Day at Kilbride National School on 11th April, while there were more business interests than community members at the Clayton Hotel Open Day on the 12th April. Staff have held meetings with elected members at Ratoath and Ashbourne Municipal Districts (MD), and with the Chief Executives and management teams of both Meath and Fingal Councils.

There are two scheduled Open Days and Community Clinics still to take place:

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| 26 th April | The Hatchet Inn, Barstown |
| 27 th April | St. Margaret’s GAA Club, Ballystrahan, St. Margaret’s |

The following mobile information sessions:

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| 2 nd May | Dunboyne AFC, Summerhill Road, 10am-1pm |
| 2 nd May | Caffreys of Batterstown, 1.30pm-4.30pm |
| 3 rd May | The Coachman’s Inn, Cloughran, 10am-1.30pm |
| 3 rd May | Sweeneys of Kilbride, Priest Town, 1.30pm-4.30pm |

and a second webinar to come

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| 2 nd May | from 7-8pm |
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for which registration can be found on the project website ([What's Happening Now? \(eirgridgroup.com\)](http://eirgridgroup.com))

Staff have been door to door along the route near Belcamp and Kilbride, even receiving tea and cake from some residents. Other areas, including those in the vicinity of Batterstown, will be covered in the coming weeks. They have put posters and brochures in libraries and post offices to try to extend the reach of consultations and expressed thanks to Community Forum members that have assisted with passing on the information.

Community Feedback to Liaison Staff so far – traffic management concerns

The most significant feedback that EirGrid staff are hearing from residents is concern over traffic issues during the construction period. This is all documented and fed into the project team and will be given to the ESB who will be the construction entity here. There is also an agreement to co-ordinate construction with Fingal and Meath County Councils' road repairs programme to attempt to minimise disruption and avoid repeated work on the same stretches of road. Staff were asked if there has been engagement with Fingal on development of new roads and specifically whether, once the final route choice is made, the Council will announce construction of new roads. In response, the EirGrid staff stressed that the choice of the Red Route is not definite until an announcement of the Best Performing Route Option in the summer and may change. They indicated that nothing specific has arisen in relation to new roads, but that the Council is aware of the need for increased power supply to North Dublin and the need to link in with EirGrid on future plans. They also confirmed that when the announcement of the final route option is made in the summer the exact route will be clear i.e., there will no longer be "bubbles" along the route map, but a clearly located line throughout.

The details of traffic management plans will be finalised as the detail of the route is further developed. There is no plan for any road closures at this time.

It was noted that for many local people the actual development seems so far in the future that they don't perceive an urgency to engage. It was seen as important to get people to make inputs and have their say now.

"Bubbles" along the route

There was a question about the likely location of the route within "bubbles" where there is a choice between one or other side of a main road, for example around Hollystown. An indication in these areas might be helpful, given the planned relocation of the Hollystown Community Centre and all associated traffic to the Golf Club for approximately 8 months duration while works are carried out to their own buildings. A date for this work is not yet confirmed and has been pushed forwards so that it may overlap with EirGrid construction. The implications for the GAA Centre of Excellence were also raised. The EirGrid staff agreed to feed this information back to the Project Management Team and make contact with the relevant groups but were able to say that the route will not go straight through Hollystown; the presence of the "bubble" indicates that a significant portion will be off-road and, in these areas, the EirGrid Agricultural Liaison Officers are currently speaking with individual landowners.

In the Ashbourne area, when infrastructure was being put in for the solar farms the possibility of providing additional ducting for future developments was raised at the MD meetings. While this may have been relevant only for the solar developments, EirGrid was asked whether it is exploring what was done. The staff explained that EirGrid has ongoing communications with the various different departments of the County Council. Where there is the "bubble" at St. Margarets, and along the R108, the Project Team will be working through options here with technical stakeholders such as the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA), Irish Water, Irish Rail, etc. In response to a question, the EirGrid staff indicated that they will ask the Project Management Team whether the Airport Masterplan has come up in discussions around the upgrade project.

Linking in with other Plans and Development

The Fingal Development Plan is due for publication imminently and EirGrid's own large team of planners will be familiar with this and all other local plans and working to dovetail design and construction activities with these. Before the route announcement is made in the summer, EirGrid will have gone back to the County Councils so that they know of any issues before they arise.

Health and Property Valuation issues

Grainne and Eoghan noted that there have not been issues in relation to health or property devaluation raised by residents that they have spoken with. These did not emerge as issues in the public consultation phase in the autumn of 2022, possibly largely because of the underground nature of the development. (The Step 4 consultation and engagement report can be found at <https://www.eirgridgroup.com/the-grid/projects/cp1021/related-documents/>) A serious and very specific health issue emerged in relation to one family and their needs were factored into the route selection for the Emerging Best Performing Option. This example demonstrates the importance of hearing from the community and the Community Liaison Officers then being able to advocate on behalf of the community regarding issues they raise.

Contact and communication during construction

Forum members stressed the importance of having very clear responsibilities for safety issues during construction and contact information available. Whether this is to address fears when people see issues of concern or have real and immediate problems relating to construction works such as blocked drains and flooding where cables have been laid which require to be sorted by the developer or the Council but cannot safely be touched by a landowner. There was a suggestion that a project Facebook page and other social media for the duration of the construction would allow both for live/ timely updates and information as well as point of contact or source of contact information when this is needed. Similarly, a WhatsApp group or text alert system would be possible.

The Community Liaison Officers will continue their involvement with the project during the construction phase to ensure delivery of what has been undertaken and they will be a route to raise issues to be addressed.

Community Benefit Fund

While it is understood that the Community Benefit Fund will fund will become available in instalments once construction begins, there was a request for an indication of what level of funding would be available so that communities can plan projects that can take best advantage of this.

Grainne indicated that the Fund will equate to 3% of the total capital cost of the cable, approximately €1.5 million, and will be allocated pro-rata by mileage between Fingal and Meath stretches of the route. The Fund will be allocated across the three pillars of Environment, Sustainability (such as retro-fitting) and Community. After the Best Performing Option is announced, in the autumn of 2023 there will be an opportunity to look at the Sustainable Development Goals, communities' own needs for the long term, etc. and inputs from organisations such as the Sustainable Energies Alliance Ireland (SEAI) and Leader to build capacity within the community to see how funding sources can be joined up to maximise resources and long-term benefits. A Fund Administrator will be appointed and there will be meetings on how to apply and opportunities for communities to be prepared and ready to apply and proceed with projects as early as possible.

Contractors for work on development

Forum members indicated a preference to see EirGrid responsible for the work being carried out via direct labour rather than using contractors as standard are seen to vary so significantly, even within the operations of a single contractor. Concerns were expressed regarding the quality of workmanship and the hope that EirGrid will prioritise tidy work of good quality to avoid long-term costs of subsidence, failing road quality, etc.

Staff indicated that there are likely to be 3 teams working along the length of the route at any one time. At present it is not known whether there will be one or more contractors involved.

Forum members requested that EirGrid be aware of climate conditions that impact on works, and particularly the success and longevity of road repairs. Summer works are certainly preferred for road surface work which will not be effective between September and December. It will be important to think of phasing of work to avoid this issue that has created big problems in the past.

Construction at night and tunnelling

In response to a question about whether works might be undertaken at night, particularly at choke points along the route (e.g. the Ward Cross roundabout), Eoghan indicated that this is not common but will be considered where there is heavy road use. Where night-time works are to be carried out, residents need to be made aware of these in advance and noise disruption minimised.

It was confirmed that where the route crosses motorways and the Tolka river, horizontal directional drilling (HDD) will be used during construction.

Any other business

No additional items of business were raised for discussion.

Next meeting

It was agreed that the Forum will wait until the June when EirGrid is ready to announce the Best Performing Route to meet again. Harriet will check in with members in the intervening period and pass on communications from EirGrid as they arrive. If members feel a meeting would be desirable sooner, this is also possible.

As there was no further business, everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting ended at 8.30pm.