

East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade

Community Forum

7.30pm, 4th June 2024, via Zoom

Attending (members): David Branagan (Fingal Chamber), Helena Merriman (St. Margaret's Parish Hall Committee), Walter Moran (Dunboyne AFC), Sheelagh Morris (St Margarets Action Committee), Liam O Gradaigh (St. Margaret's GAA), Denis O'Leary (Kilbride Tidy Towns), Pat Smith (Co. Meath Chamber), Pearse Sutton (St. Margaret's The Ward)

Attending (guests): Bernadine Carroll (M-Co), Eric Dennis (KSN Energy), Grainne Duffy (EirGrid)

Apologies: Deirdre Arthur (Craobh Chiarain GAA), Cllr. Cathal Boland (Fingal Co. Council), Julie Dowd (Scoil Bhride, Kilbride), Philip McCormack (Batterstown Village Enhancement Assoc.), Tom O'Mahony (Dunboyne Community Centre), Cllr. Caroline O'Reilly (Meath Co. Co.),

Facilitation: Harriet Emerson

Welcome & Agenda

All members and guests were welcomed. Grainne Duffy was attending for EirGrid, Bernadine Carroll for M-Co, and Eric Dennis for KSN Energy.

The agenda items, which were previously circulated, were agreed.

Minutes of meeting on 22nd April 2024 & matters arising

Those who had been present at the meeting approved the draft minutes of the 22nd April 2024 (previously circulated). No matters were identified for further discussion at this point.

Introduction of Bernadine Carroll (M-Co)

Grainne introduced Bernadine Carroll of M-Co, which is EirGrid's public engagement partner. M-Co is undertaking a review of EirGrid's public engagement approach, so that the learning from this can be used to enhance how Community Forums function in the future. Bernadine explained that as part of this work, she is hoping to hold brief interviews with a number of Forum members to discover what they feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the Forum structure and process. She hopes to record very short videos with Forum members that might be used to explain what the Forums are, how they work, and to encourage other community representatives to take part in the future. If any Forum member is interested in talking with Bernadine, they are invited to contact her directly (bcarroll@mco.ie).

Sustainable Energy Agency Ireland (SEAI) and Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC)

Eric Dennis, Programme Manager with KSN Energy and Fingal County Mentor (SEAI), gave a presentation on SEAI initiatives for creating energy efficient homes and community buildings. In the context of objectives set in the National Climate Action Plan, Eric outlined the principal energy uses and sources of energy loss within our homes and buildings. In relation to individual homes, he set out the benefits to be gained from **Home Energy Upgrades** and the 3 steps towards achieving this: Assess (with a Building Energy Rating/ BER assessment), Insulate, and then Add Renewables. This process sets out where energy is being lost in a building and the ways in which energy efficiency can be improved, it then focuses on ensuring energy loss is minimised through effective insulation measures, before considering installation of renewable energy sources such as heat pumps. Eric explained the different ways to access the SEAI grants that are available for insulation measures and installation of renewables. Most of these grants are also available, along with other supports, to SECs.

Of most relevance to Forum members are the community-based measures that SEAI support; **Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC)** are very quick to set up and can be of very different scales. These can also provide supports to household, as well as to look into community buildings, and other schemes that communities undertake. When setting up an SEC, a full day of mentoring is provided to assist communities to learn about how the scheme works and the ways they may be able to benefit from it, often this includes public meetings to introduce as many people as possible to the possibilities. SECs are then eligible for 100% funding to carry out an Energy Master Plan that includes

- a baseline review of energy use and
- creates a register of energy opportunities; measures that the community might take to reduce energy use and use more renewable energy supplies.

There are now over 800 SECs around the country.

SECs can be supported with capital funding, partnerships, and technical support. Projects need to be community oriented with a cross-sectoral approach and be able to show that they can sustainably finance the proposed project. Projects vary in scale from €50,000 up to €5 million and can access grants of between 35% and 80%.

Ambitious communities, usually with access to significant areas of land and close to a substation, may consider the **Renewable Energy Support Scheme**, if they wish to generate renewable power themselves. SEAI will provide groups with expert and financial support, as well as an information toolkit. More information is available from communityress@seai.ie

Eric shared examples of how SECs have reduced energy use through installation of solar PV, heating controls, insulation, e-efficient heating, transport projects, and in lighting and achieved considerable cost savings. For more information on the variety of actions being taken check out www.seai.ie/sec (*slides attached*)

Possible combined noise and heat insulation

In discussion, a question was raised about whether heat insulation could be combined with noise insulation, for communities near the airport that have an issue with this. Eric was confident that there would be an insulation board that could help with sound reduction also, although this is likely to be more expensive. However, if the board meets the U values (for heat insulation) required by the SEAI and has necessary CE certification, then it should be possible to use this and qualify for grants. He suggested engaging with a Project Co-ordinator to get the legwork done and possibly communicate with the DAA or others in this area for information and potentially additional support. He undertook to forward this query to SEAI.

Old and listed buildings and planning permissions

Older buildings may present challenges in terms of insulation and energy supply but can still be included in SEC Energy Master Plans, so that the community can assess what may be done to make them more energy efficient, warmer, more pleasant environments.

Listed buildings will need relevant approvals from the County Council or other regulatory body before works can be carried out. Where needed, planning permission and other authorities will need to be in place for works and funding to be approved by both SEAI and the Community Benefit Fund.

Cost savings vs payback period

A query was raised about the relatively high cost of installation of renewable energy sources and their lifetime before replacement costs become necessary. Eric responded that like oil or gas boilers or a car, there will be a need to replace equipment in time. Air-to-Water heat pumps are generally lasting around 15 years at present, geo-thermal pumps have a lifetime of between 20 and 25yr, longer if the system is run off 3 phase power. Costs at present average around €16,000-€20,000 for an Air-to-Water pump. Solar PV panels last between 25 and 30 years on average and do not all need

batteries. Where they have batteries, they are likely to need changing at 10-12 year intervals. He confirmed that optimum insulation is necessary in the building before moving to consider installing renewable energy sources.

Amount of work involved in SEC Projects a barrier to action

A challenge for SECs, based on experience of a Forum member, was explained; where the amount of work involved for volunteers to progress projects and subsequent actions can be a barrier to being able to undertake work. Eric responded that SECs need to make maximum use of their local mentors and Regional Co-ordinator but also indicated that this issue is being considered by SEAI and he hopes to be able to give a fuller answer in due course.

Getting “shovel ready” to take advantage of funding

It was confirmed that setting up an SEC and completing an Energy Master Plan significantly improves the chances of a community in applying for SEAI funding. Completing these steps assists communities to be ready to proceed with projects and fully aware of what is involved. The same is true in relation to securing planning or other permissions needed for works. Having this work already completed will make it simpler to apply under the EirGrid Community Benefit Fund also.

Sources of match funding and link to EirGrid Community Benefit Fund

Clarification was sought on where the balance of funds to match grants could be obtained. SEAI requires that there is evidence of the ability to generate those funds and complete the works. It is not entirely clear whether using other SEAI sourced funds would be allowable, such as the Community Climate Action awards that are being administered by the County Councils. EirGrid's Community Benefit Fund could be used in conjunction or to complement actions for which SEAI grants are made available. However, Grainne was able to clarify that some funding would have to be provided by the relevant community groups themselves. The extent of this will need to be clarified once the Fund Administrator is in place.

East Meath / North Dublin Grid Upgrade Update

Grainne informed the Forum that An Bord Pleanála's public consultation phase closed on the 23rd May last. It remains to be seen if they will request further information from EirGrid or whether it is a matter of waiting for a final decision.

Notice of Further Proposed Infrastructure Upgrades

Grainne explained that EirGrid is responding to demand from the ESB and local authorities for increased electricity supplies in the North Dublin, East Meath areas to support housing and business development, which are currently held up because of lack of supply. EirGrid is therefore developing proposals for the two new substations in this area and associated infrastructure.

While this is separate from the upgrade that this Forum is concerned with, Grainne felt it was important that members were aware of this additional development. She spent some time explaining the objective and location and that, having established the need for this, EirGrid has been looking at possible technologies to deliver it. A leaflet drop after the 10th June will inform local households about this development. A copy of this leaflet (attached) will be circulated with the minutes of this meeting. Anyone with concerns in relation to this, is welcome to contact Grainne (grainne.duffy@eirgrid.com).

Next and Future meeting

Harriet informed members that Eilish Harrington, CEO of Fingal Leader, has agreed to talk to the Forum on the Leader programme. This meeting is scheduled for September 4th at 7pm with the venue to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.