

5 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

5.1 General

This section considers the proposed offshore development in the context of the relevant Regional and National Policy Guidelines and Local Plans. With regard to the issue of planning permission, it should be noted that the onshore elements considered under this section fall under what is considered as exempted development under Local Government (Planning and Development Regulations) 1994.

5.2 Existing and Future Natural Gas Network

5.2.1 Current

The natural gas supply from the Corrib Field will feed into to the existing and planned national gas network. **Figure 5.1** shows the extent of the current Bord Gáis Éireann network which essentially comprises the Limerick-Cork-Dublin pipeline and spur lines from it. As illustrated, the existing natural gas network is located primarily in the south and east of Ireland with no infrastructure in the north or west to support gas production or transmission or distribution.

The Interconnector between Scotland and Loughshinny, North County Dublin was completed in 1993.

5.2.2 Future

Bord Gáis Éireann plans to extend the gas network westwards from Dublin to Galway which would also serve the Midlands. A pipeline between Galway and Limerick serving Ennis and Shannon is also proposed by Bord Gáis Éireann which would complete a national ring main. A second interconnector with Scotland parallel to the original interconnector has been approved but construction has not yet begun.

From the proposed Corrib Terminal, the gas will be transported onwards through a new pipeline to Craughwell in Galway where it will enter the proposed national gas ring main.

Figure 5.1 shows how the proposed Corrib Gas Terminal and proposed pipeline integrate with the existing and planned Bord Gáis Éireann network. Although it is not in the control of Enterprise, there is the clear potential for gas to be made available to other centres of population and industry along the pipeline route. This would be dependent upon economic and other considerations.

5.3 National Planning Context

5.3.1 Government Guidelines

Current planning philosophy generally places strong emphasis on the need for ‘sustainable planning and development’ and in this regard, planning policies are being enhanced by an increasing volume of Government Policy Directives, Guidelines and European Union Policy.

The National Gas Grid

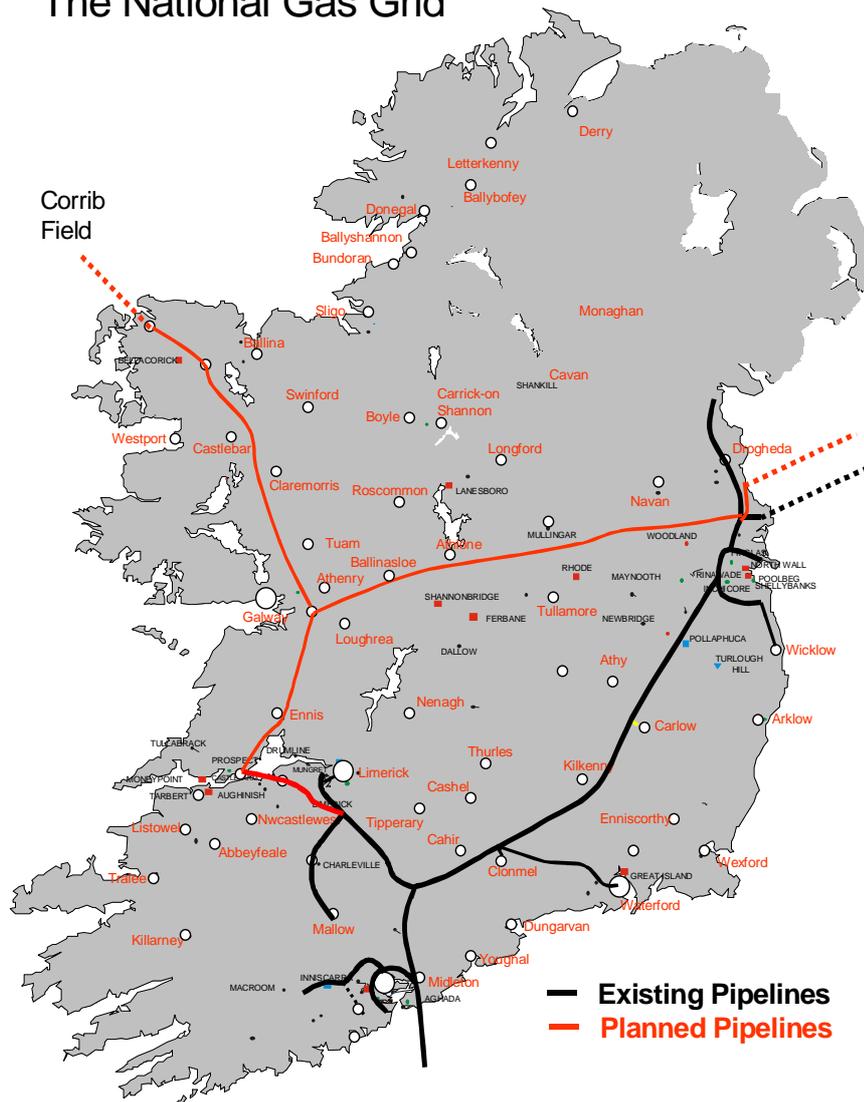


Figure 5.1: Existing and proposed Bord Gáis Eireann transmission network

The National Sustainable Development Strategy – ‘Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland’ issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government in 1997 sets out the present

Government policy of encouraging more sustainable development in all sectors.

In particular, the following objectives are promoted in the interests of sustainability in the energy sector:

- using energy more efficiently;
- cleaning up energy production;
- using energy sources which minimise damage to the environment; and
- promotion of indigenous energy resources and reducing dependence on imported fuels.

Natural gas, particularly that which is as pure as that found in the Corrib Field, is an adaptable, clean energy resource and is consistent with these objectives. Ireland, however, faces a difficult period, with potential supply shortages if indigenous sources are not exploited in a timely fashion.

The Department of Public Enterprise published the 'Green Paper on Sustainable Energy' in September 1999. The report predicts a 'dramatic increase in the contribution of natural gas to the electricity supply mix'. From a base of 30% in 1998, natural gas is projected by 2010 to account for 56% of the fuel mix for electricity generation. In the context of increasing dependency on natural gas in power generation, the government's Green Paper concludes that measures such as liquid natural gas storage and pipeline construction will be required to protect the security of supply to the national gas network.

While a number of Circulars and Guidelines relating to Planning Policy and Development Control have been issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, none of these address the subject of oil and gas development or the wider issue regarding the siting of large scale energy/industrial installations or the routing of pipelines.

5.3.2 European NUTS II Regions-Objective 1 and Objective 2

The Nomenclature Of Territorial Units For Statistics (NUTS) was created by 'Eurostat' in order to create a territorial classification within the European Union (EU) and has been used for the distribution of Structural Funds since 1988.

The current classification subdivides the 15 countries of the EU into:

- 78 NUTS level I territorial units (including Ireland);
- 210 NUTS level II territorial units; and
- 1093 NUTS level III territorial units.

Between 1994 and 1999, regions eligible for Objective 1 were NUTS II level regions whose:

- GDP per habitant was less than 75% of the community average; or;

- regions whose GDP per habitant was close to the community average; but in which there were particular circumstances which led them to be included in Objective 1.

Ireland was one of 206 regions in the EU at the NUTS II level for the period 1994-1999. This has now changed for the period 2000-2006 with two NUTS II regions in Ireland, namely, the 'Southern and Eastern Region' and 'the Border, Midlands and Western Region' (BMW).

The BMW, which includes counties Mayo, Galway, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan, Longford, Westmeath, Laois, Offaly and Louth, is an Objective 1 region while the Southern and Eastern Region is an Objective 2 region.

This means that the area is considered "disadvantaged" in terms of social and physical infrastructure and qualifies for the maximum allocation of structural and cohesion funds from the EU.

5.3.3 *The National Development Plan 2000-2006*

The National Development Plan 2000-2006 will involve an investment of over £40 billion during that period. This investment is broken down by region in line with the NUTS II Region designation of Ireland as outlined above. The National Development Plan investment strategy places a strong emphasis on underpinning the national economic success of recent years and seeks to redress the regional disparities in economic wealth between and within the regions.

A total of £13.562 billion is to be spent in the BMW region through the various sectoral programmes, with almost £6 billion to be devoted to economic and social infrastructure.

5.3.4 *'National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006'(ESRI)*

As part of the preparations for the National Development Plan 2000-2006, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) produced a report entitled: *'National Investment Priorities for the period 2000-2006'*.

In general terms, the report recognises that commercial pressures, combined with the need to meet environmental standards, have raised the dependence on gas which in turn, has raised issues concerning security of supply and delivery of gas and electricity in Ireland. The report identifies that the rapid growth in the economy will require considerable investment in the electricity and gas industries over the coming decade.

The ESRI report also recognises the importance of the Corrib Field specifically as follows:

'In the case of gas, major investment in transmission will be needed in the next planning period. This new investment will be needed to cater for increased demand, especially from the electricity sector. However, the potential gas find off the West Coast gives rise to considerable uncertainty as to what is the best way to proceed.'

While it had been proposed to possibly extend the availability of gas into the West it is clearly inappropriate to do so at present. As mentioned above, the prospect of a gas find off the West Coast leaves open the possibility that such an extension could be carried out quite cheaply. In the absence of such a find it would appear that such an extension would not be justified on cost grounds, as it would absorb scarce resources which would be better spent in promoting regional development in other ways. Certainly the prospect of a new find makes the value of the option of delaying any decision on a further extension very high.'

On the above basis, the proposed Corrib development will have benefits in terms of:

- (a) meeting the national demand for gas and electricity and reducing the need to import natural gas; and
- (b) supplying natural gas to the West of Ireland where this would otherwise not be an economically viable option.

5.3.5 Proposed National Spatial Strategy

Work on the National Spatial Strategy is currently underway and is due to be published by late 2001.

5.4 Regional Planning Context

5.4.1 'The Border, Midlands and Western Region – Development Strategy 2000-2006'

The role of the Regional Authority is primarily one of guidance on matters of regional importance.

'The Border, Midlands and Western Region – Development Strategy 2000-2006' Report (April 1999) was prepared for the Regional Authorities as 'a single prioritised strategic plan' for the BMW region as an input to the proposed National Spatial Strategy.

Section 2 of this report (Regional Priorities) refers to major natural gas projects including extending the network to the Midlands and West.

The Report states:

Major Extension to the Midlands and West.

One of the key priorities for the energy sector in the Programme for Government "Action for the Millennium" is to extend natural gas as far as practicable to major towns and cities. Bord Gáis has a statutory obligation to develop and maintain a system for the supply of natural gas on a commercial basis. Any proposals for the extension of the gas network are to be assessed by Bord Gáis in light of that obligation. The proposed extension would provide gas to Mullingar,

Athlone, Ballinasloe and Galway (and to Ennis and Shannon). Studies by Bord Gáis have indicated that the extension of the network into many towns would not provide a positive return on investment. However, the extension of the network would give residents, industry and enterprise the same choice of fuels as is now available in the areas served by the existing network.

The location of the proposed Corrib Field development is significant in terms of its impacts on the economic and social development of the west of Ireland and County Mayo in particular. Through its location, the development removes one of the main commercial constraints to supplying gas to County Mayo.

5.5 Local Statutory Development Plan Context

The Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963, as amended, places a responsibility on each Local Authority for control of development in their jurisdiction and requires each Planning Authority to prepare a Development Plan for that area and review it at least every five years. The Development Plan defines development objectives and development control policies for its functional area. The Mayo County Development Plan, 1992 is the current statutory Development Plan for County Mayo.

5.5.1 Mayo County Development Plan, 1992

In this instance Mayo County Council's functional area extends only to the High Water Mark and thus they have no jurisdiction over the offshore or foreshore elements of the Corrib Development. Notwithstanding this, the landfall facilities and the crossings of the Sruwaddacon are considered in the context of the general provisions of the Mayo County Development Plan.

In relation to Population and Employment, it is the policy of Mayo County Council '*to assist the proper exploitation of the natural and industrial resources of the County in order to maximise employment opportunities and reduce emigration.*'

A series of maps contained in the 1992 Mayo County Development Plan (**Table 5.1**) illustrate a number of Development Objectives relating to areas to be protected, preserved, enhanced or developed for various uses.

The proposed landfall facilities and the crossings of the Sruwaddacon have been located as far as is practicable to minimise the impact on the receiving environment and any areas of amenity, archaeological, cultural, geological or ecological importance, and other objectives contained in the 1992 County Development Plan.

Table 5.1: Mayo County Development Plan 1992 – Maps 1-12, Infrastructure, Resources and Development Control Objectives

Development Objective	Map	Impact on Areas Outlined In Development Plan
Physical and Administrative Boundaries	1.	Within Gaeltacht Area
Road Classification	2A. 2B.	None None
Transport Services	3.	None
State Forests	4.	None
Commercial Turf and Sand and Gravel	5.	None
Minerals Prospecting	6.	None
Aquaculture Areas	7.	None
Forest and Wildlife Areas	8.	None
Scenic Views	9.	Temporary impact on Scenic Views during construction. No impact once the development is completed
Areas of Special Scenic Importance	10.	Temporary impact on Areas of Special Scenic Importance during construction. No impact once the development is completed
Areas of Special Recreational Importance	11.	Temporary impact on beaches during construction. No impact once the development is completed
Controlled Roads	12.	None

5.6 Impact of the Development on Strategic National Planning and Regional Development

The west of Ireland has a clear infrastructure deficit at present, in terms of energy infrastructure.

As outlined in the ESRI report-'*National Investment Priorities for the period 2000-2006*', the current proposal to bring natural gas ashore at Dooncarton increases the economic viability of extending the gas network into the west and particularly into areas such as County Mayo which are otherwise unlikely to benefit from this resource.

The introduction of natural gas will contribute to the regional development of the western region and County Mayo in particular, by acting as a catalyst to economic development and encouraging investment in industry and commerce and thereby promoting migration into the region. The Corrib development would therefore contribute to the area in terms of its population base, economic productivity and general affluence.

In line with the 'National Development Plan 2000-2006', the upcoming National Spatial Plan is likely to emphasise the need for greater equality between the regions by promoting the development of strategic infrastructure and the economy of the "Objective one" areas.

The proposed development will facilitate a natural gas connection to both regional and local “growth centres”, thereby improving the economic competitiveness of these centres. However, this is now a matter for Bord Gáis Éireann and the Government.

5.7 Impacts on Land Use

When considering a development of this nature, the potential impact on land use should be considered for each of two distinct stages: the short-term impact of the construction phase and the longer-term effects of the post-construction phase.

The overall land use impacts of the landfall and two estuary crossings on the local farming community are minor. Small land areas are required in each case and land use and environmental impacts are possible, both within the sites and on the surrounding area. The issue of location is, therefore, an important consideration.

In the above context, choice of location for the proposed landfall and two estuary crossings was considered with regard to the land use requirements and environmental impacts. Environmental impacts on flora, fauna, soil, water, air and the landscape and appropriate mitigation measures are considered throughout the EIS. More importantly, however, these factors were also considered in the initial assessment and choice of site location (See **Section 4**).

The proposed landfall will temporarily require 5 hectares (ha) of land for storage of machinery, subsoil and pipe, while the downstream Sruwaddacon crossing will require 1 ha on the west bank, and 2.5 on the east, and the upstream crossing will require 1.5 ha on the north bank and 4 ha on the south.

Outside of the sites, local residents and visitors to the area will be aware of the construction activities through noise or associated traffic movements. Measures to address/mitigate the noise, visual and traffic impacts are addressed in **Sections 11, 12 and 15** respectively.

As the landfall and estuary crossing points are located in an area where there is a low population density, impacts on land use and human activities will be minimal. The nearest villages to the landfall are Rosspoint (1 km to the east) and Pollatomish (2 km to the south), however, there are a number of houses located at Dooncarton and Barnacuille, closer to the actual landfall site. Rosspoint is also approximately 0.3 km to the east of the first estuary crossing, whilst at the second estuary crossing Aghoos to the west and Muingnabo and Annie Brady Bridge to the north are the nearest small villages. There will be no significant land use impacts on any of these settlements as a result of the proposed offshore development.

During the construction phase, there may be periodic delays associated with construction traffic and deliveries to the site on the surrounding road network, with associated nuisance to local inhabitants and land use activities.

The roads and traffic section (**Section 15**) outlines measures to reduce the negative effects associated with construction traffic.

5.8 Summary

The project has been designed so as to avoid built-up areas and protect any features of amenity, ecological, scientific or archaeological interest as far as possible and is consistent with statutory policies and plans.

The existing Bord Gáis Éireann network is confined to the more urbanised and industrialised areas in the south and east of the country. However, there are proposals to extend the existing network to Galway, Ennis and Shannon. In the absence of the Corrib reserves coming ashore at Dooncarton, it is unlikely that the extension of the existing network to serve this area would be a viable option in the near future, due to the weak urban/industrial base in the west and northwest.

The proposed offshore development and associated Terminal at Bellanaboy Bridge, including the pipeline from Broadhaven Bay to Galway, will be a considerable addition to the economic infrastructure of Counties Mayo and Galway and the Border, Midlands and Western Region. The availability of natural gas in the west will act as a catalyst to economic development and will help to redress regional economic imbalance between the regions, which is a key objective of the current National Development Plan. There are considerable national economic benefits also arising from the security of indigenous gas supply to the national power generating network and to industry.

There will be temporary land use impacts associated with the construction phase of the proposed pipeline, such as suspension of farm activities within the working area and delays at road crossings. During the post-construction or operational phase, the landscape will be reinstated to its previous condition and the impact will be negligible.

The proposed valve station at Dooncarton will result in the long term loss of about 0.01 ha of land (for the tie in). It has been sited to minimise its visual impact on local residential properties and near views.