



Part 8 - Planning Report

Solar Photovoltaic Arrays

Áras An Chontae, Mount Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, N91 FH4N.

Westmeath County Council seeks Part 8 approval to erect mid-size solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays at Áras an Chontae, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, recognising the contribution that solar energy makes to meeting national, regional and public sector climate targets. The public sector will play a leading role in Ireland's transition to net zero emissions, by developing a strategy to achieve at least a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, as outlined in Ireland's Climate Action Plan.

The erection of pv panels will provide an opportunity to produce zero emissions, sun power electricity onsite and directly replace grid electricity. The creation of energy from the sun will reduce our reliance on energy from fossil fuels, which in turn will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase our energy efficiency. The development will also contribute to meeting our Regional Policy Objective 7.40, which states how Local Authorities should include policies to promote high levels of energy conservation, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources in existing buildings.

The project is expected to produce approximately 7%, or 43, 571 kWh, of the energy currently being consumed onsite annually. Sun patterns show that energy yield produced from the 51.75 kWp system will be at its highest during the brighter summer months. The system is based off a recommendation of an East/West and South facing ballasted photovoltaic arrays, which will be gravel finished with a similar membrane underlay.

Subject to final design, it is intended that the proposed system will consist of 138 x 375Wp solar modules on a ballasted 10° mounting system, which will be connected to 3 phase inverters and erected on the roof area above the administrative offices at Áras An Chontae. PV Panels will typically be rectangular in shape, approx. 1.7m x 1m in size with an output between 200-380 Wp.

Westmeath County Council are aware that the erection of PV panels will be in close proximity to the old County Buildings, which is a protected building, NIAH No. 15310076, RPS No. 019-087. Information regarding the location and scale of the panels have been received from the consultant. These details have been assessed and due to offset from the edge of the building and the existing parapet walls, the panels will not be visible on the elevations and hence they will not affect the merit of the building.

Glint and Glare screening considered the potential for any visual hazards caused by the photovoltaic panels but due to the location and positioning of the panel's further analysis for glint and glare potential was deemed unnecessary.

From an initial Appropriate Assessment screening, we are confident that there will be no significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. Our screening took consideration of the nature, duration, scale and siting of the works.

An Environmental Impact Assessment was also screened out, with consideration to the nature, duration, scale and siting of the works. We are confident that there will be no significant effects to the environment as a result of this development.

A target date of Q2 2023 has been set for the project delivery, which will be funded by Westmeath County Council's resources, with support from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, (SEAI).