



Kells Cluster Project

Winter Update 2020



The current. The future.



Who are SONI – and what do we do?

SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) operates the electricity grid. We bring electricity to every part of Northern Ireland, and plan ahead for future growth. A better energy supply means greater prosperity in the years ahead.

At SONI, we work to ensure a bright future for everyone. From our control centre in Belfast, we manage, operate and plan the development of the electricity transmission grid. The transmission grid brings power from where it is generated to where it is needed throughout Northern Ireland. We match supply and demand for power, every second of every day. We also power Northern Ireland Electricity Networks' distribution grid. This supplies electricity to homes, farms and businesses.

Investing in and improving the grid is essential to make your supply of electricity more reliable and cost effective. It also supports economic growth and enables competition.

Finally, we need to develop the grid so it can connect to new sources of energy including renewables.

What is the Kells Cluster Project and why is it needed?

SONI is obliged to connect parties who request a connection to the electricity network, subject to the applicant meeting certain conditions. When it comes to connecting sources of renewable power to the transmission grid, SONI is responsible for elements such as technical design, site selection and achieving planning consent for the new connection. These happen before a project moves into the construction phase. NIE Networks is then responsible for building and maintaining the infrastructure.

In some locations, and to some observers, electricity infrastructure has a visual impact on the landscape. We aim to create as little disturbance as possible. It was for this reason that a cluster connection policy was developed by NIE Networks, following consultation, approved by the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland.

There are already a number of renewable power projects in the Greater Ballymena/Antrim areas that have planning permission. In order to connect these to the transmission system, we are applying for planning permission to develop what is known as a cluster substation. This particular scheme is known as the Kells Cluster Project.

The Kells Cluster Project involves upgrade works **within the grounds of the existing** Kells Grid substation.

The new development will include a switchroom building, 2 new 110/33 kV transformers and a short section of underground cable, all located within the existing boundary of the Kells Grid Substation.

This will allow the renewable generation developments to connect to the distribution system allowing the energy generated to be carried on the network and transferred to where it is needed.

To achieve this, SONI is seeking planning permission to construct and install the following:

- A 33kV switchroom building.
- 2 x 110/33 kV transformers within the grounds of the existing Kells Grid substation.
- Approx. 200 metres of underground cable connecting the new substation to the existing transmission network – this will be within the confines of the current substation site.



Map showing the approximate area serviced by Kells Grid Substation



This is an approximate area that recognizes the 10km radius set out in the cluster policy developed and agreed between NIE Networks and the Utility Regulator

The Kells Cluster Project will strengthen the transmission network in the local area and ensure it is fit for future use. This will facilitate economic growth and investment in the coming years. This project will also play an important role in the surrounding area by ensuring a secure supply of electricity is available.

We have been working to meet the challenges of operating the electricity system while achieving high renewable electricity targets. Northern Ireland recently achieved 40 per cent renewable energy on the electricity system. Transmission infrastructure such as the Kells Cluster Project is vital if Northern Ireland is to continue to helping to achieve such high renewable electricity targets.

The Proposed Site

The address of the site is the existing Kells 275kV grid substation, Maxwells Rd, Ballymena, Northern Ireland. This project involves work **within the existing site boundary** on land that is owned by NIE Networks. The proposed work area accounts for approximately 3200sqm, circa 5% of the existing substation site.

Project Scope

The Kells cluster substation will be built as a 33kV Switchboard (a switchboard is a device that allows electricity to be redirected from one or more sources) and 2 x 110/33 kV transformers which will connect into the pre-existing main Kells Grid Substation.

Grid Development

At an early stage in the project, SONI highlighted the existing Kells Grid Substation development as a suitable location. This is already owned by NIE Networks and therefore limits any potential impact on landowners and the local area.

Next Steps

While this project does not meet the threshold for statutory Pre-Application Community Consultation, SONI is carrying out extensive consultation with local stakeholders before any planning application is submitted.

As part of this engagement, SONI will host a public event in the local area. We will write to neighbours and landowners in the vicinity, and notify local elected reps and Council officials. SONI aims to ensure local

stakeholders can access information about the proposal and provide feedback before any planning application is submitted. We intend to submit the planning application in Spring 2020. A detailed Pre-Application Community Consultation (PACC) Report will be submitted alongside the planning application, outlining the engagement activity carried out by SONI and providing a summary of the feedback received.

After the planning application is submitted, the public will have the opportunity to submit their views on the project directly to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. We are hopeful that the Council will reach a decision on the planning application in 2020.

Your feedback is important to us

We evaluate all the feedback we receive and try our best to develop the project around your views. Please feel free to contact us with any feedback you have.

In the meantime, please find our contact details on the back of this brochure if you want to get in touch.

Contact information

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