**Minutes of Special Meeting of Cavan County Council held on 13th February 2017 in the Council Chamber at 11.30a.m.**

Councillor F. Curtin, Cathaoirleach Presiding

Present: Minister H. Humphreys, Deputy B. Smith, Deputy N. Smyth, Deputy C. O’Caoláin, Senator D. Wilson, Senator J. O’Reilly, Senator R. Gallagher

Councillors M. Argue, W. Bennett, C. Brady, J.P. Feeley, C. Kelly, P. McDonald, P. McVitty, P. O’Reilly, S. O’Reilly, S. P. O’Reilly, P. Smith, S. Smith, V. Smith.

In Attendance: T. Ryan, Chief Executive

E. Doyle, Director of Service

G. Finn, Director of Service

E. McGinn, Meetings Administrator

An apology was received from Councillor D. Brady and Councillor P. Brady

The Cathaoirleach welcomed all to the meeting to discuss the granting of planning permission by An Bord Pleanála to Eirgrid to carry out its 400kv North-South Interconnector with overhead power lines and pylons.

Councillor C. Kelly gave a detailed account of the history of the North-South Interconnector. Councillor Kelly stated that despite the many objections to the project lodged with An Bord Pleanala during its public consultation process in 2015, and concerns raised by farmers and other members of the public and public representatives during the oral hearings in 2016, the planning body has granted permission to Eirgrid to carry out its 400kb North-South Interconnector with overhear power lines and pylons. Councillor Kelly quoted figures showing that Eirgrid spent approximately €600,000 on advertising in the run up to the oral hearing as well as funding hundreds of sponsorship across the North-East. Councillor Kelly noted that it was originally stated by Eirgrid that under grounding the structure would cost thirty times more than over grounding, however they have recently admitted that it could actually be achieved for less than double the over grounding price. Councillor Kelly highlighted under grounding cases involving developments in mainland Europe stating that the arguments put forward by Eirgrid no longer stand up to scrutiny. He stated that studies have shown that the interconnector can be under grounded in an environmentally friendly and cost effective manner. Councillor Kelly stated that Eirgrid have been economical with the truth when it comes to estimating the cost of under grounding the North South Interconnector. Councillor Kelly thanked the people of Cavan and Meath for putting their lives on hold over the last ten years in order to stop overhead power lines being placed over their lands. He stated that these people have no problem with the North South Interconnector going ahead provided that the power lines are placed under ground.

Councillor C. Brady concurred with Councillor Kelly’s report. Councillor Brady stated that locals in these areas feel that they are not being listened to and their family lives and homes are now being disrupted by the installation of these power lines.

Councillor P. McDonald stated that the money spent by Eirgrid to date could have been better served on under grounding the project. He stated that there is a lot of anger out there between farmers and landowners and they are determined that they will not let Eirgrid bully their way to place power lines over their lands.

Minister H. Humphreys thanked Cavan County Council for inviting her to the meeting stating that this is a very important and emotive issue. Minister Humphreys stated that the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs made strong submissions to An Bord Pleanála and stated that she is disappointed that they were not reflected on fully when making the decision. Minister Humphreys stated that following a meeting with Minister Naughten he will now seek a detailed independent analysis of the interconnector project costs based on representations made.

Deputy B. Smith complimented the Council for holding a special meeting. Deputy Smith informed the meeting that the Fianna Fáil party had tabled a motion to come before the Dáil on Thursday, calling for an evaluation of the potential impacts on both under grounding and over grounding for the North South Interconnector on surrounding areas, considering such as local tourism, health, landscape, agriculture and heritage.

Deputy C. O’Caoláin thanked the Councillors for their contribution and detail. He stated that it is very important that the people of Cavan, Monaghan and Meath are treated with the same respect as people in other parts of the Country. He stated that to date he had heard of nobody opposing the development, all have agreed to support the development provided the power lines are placed underground. Councillor O’Caoláin paid tribute to the efforts of protest groups, members of North-East Pylon Pressure Committee and the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee stating that he believed that all measures legal or otherwise would be used to prevent Eirgrid’s plan from proceeding. Deputy O’Caoláin stated that he supported the Fianna Fáil motion and expressed his disappointment that it was not a cross party motion. Deputy O’Caoláin stated that everybody should work together as one voice.

Deputy N. Smyth thanked the Council for inviting her to the meeting. Deputy Smyth expressed her displeasure at An Bord Pleanála’s decision to grant planning permission to Eirgrid. She stated that a cross party agreement is the only way forward. She stated that the installation of overhead power lines will have a negative impact on the landscape and livelihood of families.

Senator Joe O’Reilly stated that he had facilitated a number of meetings with NEPPC a number of years ago while working with the Department of Communications. Senator O’Reilly noted that the matter is still going through the planning process in Northern Ireland. Senator O’Reilly stated that simply forcing the project on people affected is not the way forward.

Senator D. Wilson stated that he was of the opinion that Eirgrid had made their decision from day one that the power lines will be placed over ground. He stated that this argument no longer exists as it is a decade since the first application was made and a lot has changed since particularly with regard to cost effectiveness. Senator Wilson stated that the County Development Plans of two counties have been totally ignored.

Senator Robbie Gallagher stated that the opposition is now stronger than ever giving a clear message that this project as presently presented will not go ahead. Senator Gallagher complimented Deputy O’Caoláin for organising many meetings.

Councillors S. O’Reilly, V. Smith and J.P. Feeley concurred with what was said. There was unanimous support in the Chamber to have the North South Interconnector constructed only on the grounds that the power lines are placed underground.

Councillors C. Kelly, C. Brady and P. McDonald thanked their colleagues for their contributions.

Cathaoirleach F. Curtin thanked all for their support and thanked the members of the Oireachtas and Minister Humphreys for attending the special meeting of Cavan County Council.

Chairman: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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