An Bord Pleanála



Inspector's Report

Appeal Ref. No:

Proposed Development:

Location:

Applicants:

Planning Authority Reg. Ref:

Planning Authority:

P.A. Decision:

Appeal Type:

Appellants:

Observers:

Date of Site Inspection:

Inspector:

PL27.245717

Erect one wind turbine

Kilnamanaghmore, Glenealy, County Wicklow.

Ballinagran Zero Carbon Ltd.

15/341

Wicklow County Council

Grant with Conditions

Third Party vs Grant

Enda McDermott

Darren Duffy, Gabriel Brady, Seamus O'Neil, Vincent Duffy

18th February 2016

Hugh Mannion

1. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Glenealy, County Wicklow is a linear village strung along the R752 which runs inland and southeast out of Rathnew. There is higher ground on both sides of the R752; to the northwest is Carrick Mountain (381mOD), to the southeast is Kilnamanaghmore (317mOD). The site is almost due south of this summit and situated below the elevation of the summit on a shoulder of land which provides views over an area of landscape in south Wicklow. The majority of the hill has been subject to commercial tree planting with the site accessible over a forest path. This path starts close to a house which is accessed off a local road which links Glenealy village in the west to the N11 in the east. There is an access road to a house heading south from a gated junction with the local road between Glenealy and the N11. Past this house is a small bridge over a stream and beyond that a fork in what is now a forest track. The site is accessed by following the right fork of this forest track.

The site itself has an area of 0.2365ha, is owned by Coillte who have agreed to the applicant making the application.

2. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development comprises the erection of one wind turbine (capacity 500kw) with a hub height of 50m and a blade tip height of 74.35m and control building at Kilnamanaghmore, Glenealy, County Wicklow.

3. HISTORY

There does not appear to be any relevant planning history.

4. PLANNING AUTHORITY DECISION

The planning authority granted permission subject to 17 conditions.

Initially the planning authority requested additional information in relation to;

- Submission of an amended visual impact assessment,
- Additional information on the expected noise impacts,
- Identification of an access haulage route, and
- The nature of the soil, subsoil and geology on site.

The applicant responded to the request for further information on the 25th June 2015 with the submission of;

- Additional photomontages taken at a variety of locations,
- Additional information in relation to noise impacts,
- Detailed access haulage route, and
- Details of the top soil, subsoil and bedrock on site.

The planning authority (on the 24th July 2015) sought clarification of further information in relation (a) to expected noise impacts, (b) an auto track swept path analysis of the proposed access haulage route and (c) the result of trial pit excavations on site to determine the geology of the site.

The applicant (on the 19th August 2015) submitted (a) a revised acoustic report, (b) a confirmatory statement that an autotrack swept path analysis was carried out and established that the proposed route would accommodate the expected loads, and (c) a geological assessment of the site.

The planning authority (on the 4th September 2015) sought clarification of the clarification of further information in relation the submission of a map indicating the locations of the noise sensitive receptors.

The applicant (on the 21st September 2015) in response to the planning authority's request for a map submitted a map showing the location of the noise sensitive receptors.

The planning authority's **Roads Engineer** reported no objection subject to condition.

The planning authority's **Environmental Services Section** reviewed the geological report submitted with the application and found it satisfactory.

The planning authority's **Area Engineer** reported no comments on the application.

The planning authority's **Water and Environmental Services Section** reported that the noise assessment was adequate and recommended permission subject to conditions.

5. THIRD PARTY APPEAL

The grounds of appeal may be summarised as follows;

- The application should have been accompanied by an EIS. The planning authority should have carried out an EIA screening exercise.
- In accordance with the O'Grianna vs An Bord Pleanála judgement the application should have included a connection to the national grid and an EIA of that connection. In the case of PL19.244053 the Board determined that additional information was required because the application documentation was inadequate to carry out an EIA.

6. APPLICANT'S RESPONSE

The applicant's response to the appeal may be summarised as follows;

- An AA screening assessment was submitted with the application.
- The planning authority carried out a stage 1 AA.

7. OBSERVATIONS

Observations were received from Darren Duffy, Gabriel Brady, Seamus O'Neil, Vincent Duffy. These may be summarised as follows;

- The application does not have community support.
- Access/delivery route is unsafe and inadequate.
- The visual impact assessment submitted with the application underestimates the visual impact of the proposed development.
- The proposed turbine is an outdated model which will not operate efficiently.
- The proposal will impact negatively on the flora and fauna of the area.
- The proposed turbine will negatively impact on Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve.
- The noise assessment was inadequate.

8. PLANNING AUTHORITY RESPONSE

The planning authority did not make a submission to the Board.

9. FURTHER SUBMISSIONS

The applicant responded to the observers stating that the noise analysis submitted with the application was comprehensive and that one of locations surveyed for the application was Vincent Duffy's property.

10. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The **Wind Energy Development Guidelines** (DOEHLG 2006) sets out advice to planning authorities in relation to the development of policy and development management practice in relation to wind energy development. The Guidelines make the point that the development of renewable energy sources is a European and national priority. Development Plans should be positive in supporting the provision of renewable energy, seek to maximise the potential of wind energy, identify on maps areas where wind energy development is appropriate and recognise the potential for smaller wind energy projects in urban and industrial areas.

The Guidelines offer advice in relation to environmental impacts of wind energy developments on, *inter alia*, habitats, birds, geology, archaeology. Significant issues include noise impacts, shadow flicker siting and layout.

The **Wicklow County Development Plan 2010-2015** includes a 'Wind Energy Strategy'. The site is located in an area designated as 'most favoured' for wind energy development in the plan.

The plan includes a landscape character assessment set out in Chapter 17 and supplemented by landscape character maps included on volume 2 of the plan. The application site is located in the "Eastern Access Corridor Area" which has a vulnerability rating of "medium".

11.ASSESSMENT

11.01 The principal planning issues in this case are the planning authority wind energy location policy, EIA screening, visual impacts, noise impacts, shadow flicker, haulage route, AA screening.

11.02 Development Plan Policy - Wind Energy Strategy

11.03 The Wicklow County development Plan 2010-2016 in volume 2 includes a wind energy strategy which identifies in Map 05 certain areas where wind energy development will be most favoured. The proposed development is located in an area designated as 'most favoured' for wind energy development in the Plan.

11.04 Subject to compliance with the criteria for assessment of wind energy developments set out in the County Development Plan I conclude that the proposed development complies with the Wicklow wind energy strategy.

11.05 EIA Screening

11.06 The appeal makes the related points that the proposed development will have environmental impacts, that the environmental report submitted with the application should have had a non-technical summary and that the planning application should have been accompanied by an EIA and the planning authority erred in not conducting an EIA screening exercise.

11.07 The application is for a single wind turbine. Article 3(*i*) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended require that windfarms of 5 or more turbines or having a total output of greater that 5 megawatts should be subject to EIA. This application does not meet that threshold and therefore an EIA is not mandatory. Since an EIS was not submitted with the application I conclude that a non-technical summary of any environmental reports accompanying the application do not require a non-technical summary.

11.08 As set out in the grounds of appeal this test of inclusion within a class for EIA is not definitive and where the question arises as to if a proposed development, which is of a class which would require EIA but does not exceed the threshold within that class, would be likely to have significant effects on the environment the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the 2001 Regulations should be applied. The three sets of criteria for determining if a proposed development would be likely to give rise to significant effects on the environment are; the characteristics of the proposed development, the location of the proposed development and the characteristic of the potential impacts arising from the proposed development. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government have published advice in relation to screening sub-threshold developments for EIA in "EIA–Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-Threshold Developments (2003)".

11.09 The proposed development comprises a single wind turbine which will not contribute to an accumulation of similar developments in the area, will not give rise to unreasonable use of natural resources, or produce waste or pollution. The current use of the site as scrub/commercial forest is not a particularly sensitive use, the site is relatively remote from centres of population and is not designated for protection under the Habitats or Birds Directives. Finally the impact of the proposal will be localised, non-transboundary, reversible and relatively minor. This is not to say that the proposed development will not have some impact on the environment – all human activity has an impact on the environment but having regard to the foregoing I conclude that the proposed development is *unlikely to have significant impacts* on the environment and that the proposal is not one which would require EIA in accordance with Schedule 7 of the 2001 Planning and Development Regulations.

11.10 The O'Grianna Judgement

11.11 The appeal makes the point that in the O'Grianna vs An Bord Pleanála judgement the courts found that the environmental impacts of a wind energy project could not be considered without also considering the environmental impacts of any subsequent grid connection.

11.12 In my view the significant point of that case for this appeal is that the High Court found that the Board's decision was faulty for not assessing the environmental impacts of the grid connection which was integral to the overall wind energy project: that they were "one project" and therefore under the EIA Directive required a cumulative assessment of the likely significant environmental impacts of both parts of the development.

11.13 In the present case since neither a mandatory or sub-threshold EIA is required, the O'Grianna vs An Bord Pleanála judgement does not require cumulative assessment and the present case may be considered as standalone on its merits.

11.14 Visual Impacts.

11.15 The County Development Plan includes a landscape character assessment set out in Chapter 17 and supplemented by landscape character maps included on volume 2 of the plan. The application site is located in an "access corridor area" which has a vulnerability rating of "medium" and which is described in the plan as covering the main access corridor areas of Wicklow, the boundaries generally follow what is considered to be the areas upon which the greatest influence is exerted by these access routes which for the most part, run through the more low lying and accessible tracts of land

and connect the major towns. The Eastern Corridor relates to the mainly lowland area of influence of the N11 road and is under intense pressure from residential and other sporadic development.

11.16 The planning authority sought additional photomontages to demonstrate impacts on views from nearby roads – N11, L1111, L1113, R752 and settlements at Coolbeg, Roscath, Carraigmore, Barndarig. Additional photomontages taken from the locations specified by the planning authority were submitted by the applicant and I have had regard to these in this assessment.

11.17 I conducted a site inspection which included driving a circular route along the R752 which runs from the northeast to the southwest through Glenealy village to the west of the application site, from Glenealy village southeast and east towards Coolbeg and an intersection with the M11¹, southwest from Coolbeg to Carraigmore and from there northwest along Deputy's Pass to the R752 southwest of Glenealy village. The application site is not on the summit of the hill but on a very local promontory below the summit with views to the south and southeast. The effects of this location are demonstrated by photomontages 1 and 4 submitted by the applicant on the 25th June 2015 in which the turbine will visible over a wide area. Photomontage 8 somewhat understates the impact of the turbine as the landscape along the public road both northeast and northwest is relatively open and the small promontory on which the site is located is visible. As one approaches the R752 from Carrigmore along the Deputy's Pass I conclude that the turbine will not be visible because of the intervening topography, Coilte planting and significant native tree growth along the north side of the public road.

11.18 Photomontage 2 is taken about 2.5kms southwest of the site (Tullylusk/Kilcandra) and demonstrates the negligible visual impact of the turbine. Photomontage 3 demonstrates that from a distance of about 1.5km to the southwest the turbine is visible. Photomontage 6 from the M11 demonstrates that the turbine will be virtually invisible at 4kms while in photomontage 7 from Roscath about 3kms distant from the site again the turbine is well screened.

11.19 Schedule 17.9 of the County Development Plan lists prospects of special amenity value or special interest which it is an objective of the planning authority to protect. The only such **prospect** potentially affected by the proposed development is the one listed as "L5118 Deputy's Pass,

¹ The road layout has been altered and the OS map does not accurately show the new access from the former N11 to the new M11 east of Glenealy.

Glenealy - Prospect of both sides of Deputy's Pass including woodland" and shown as prospect 40 on Map 17.11 attached to the County Development Plan. In this case I consider that both the undulating topography that intervenes between the Deputy's Pass and the application site and extensive natural and planted trees will sufficiently mitigate any impact. There are no **views** of special amenity value or special interest which it is an objective of the planning authority to protect and which are illustrated on Map 17.10 attached to the County Development Plan affected by the proposed development.

11.20 I consider that the landscape character assessment for the area set out in the County Development Plan is reflective of the landscape along the N11/M11 corridor in County Wicklow. The area of Glenealy is under significant pressure for development and the road linking Gleanely to the N11 has significant levels of one off housing. It is correct that the proposed turbine will have a visual impact when viewed from points in the surrounding area. However the proposed development will not impact on any view or prospect identified in the County Development Plan as worthy of special protection and I conclude, having regard to the assessment set out above that it will not unreasonably or seriously injure the visual amenity of the area.

11.21 Noise Impacts

11.22 The observations made to the Board in relation to the appeal makes the point that the noise assessment submitted with the application was inadequate.

11.23 The planning authority, at point 2 of the request for additional information, asked the applicant for details of the anticipated noise performance of the turbine, a background noise report with locations of noise sensitive receptors and clarification of distances within the previously submitted material.

11.24 The applicant (see submission received by the planning authority on the 19th August 2015) makes the point that there are no houses within 500m of the proposed development, that the dominant noise will be from wind and that the recommended limit values for noise at neighbouring houses will not be exceeded.

11.25 The applicant states that an assessment of the nose impacts on the five houses closest to the proposed turbine has been carried out. I note that on the rural place map submitted with the application on the 21st September 2015 that there are only 5 locations identified and dwelling number 4 referred to in the written submission is absent. Nevertheless I conducted a site inspection

partially on foot and partially by car and identified all the noise sensitive locations identified by the application documents and a further house located off the public road but between the public road and the application site. On this basis I am satisfied that there are no houses within 500m of the proposed turbine.

11.26 I agree with the application that there are no houses within 500m of the proposed site and that the Wind Energy Guidelines advise that generally noise is unlikely to be a significant problem where the distance from the turbine to the house is more than 500m. The identified noise sensitive receptors are along the link road between Glenealy and the M11 and the summit of the hill will intervene between the turbine and these dwelling houses.

11.27 Arising from my reading of the application file and the appeal and submissions made in relation to the appeal on file and my site inspection I consider that subject to a condition limiting noise output from the proposed turbine that it will not unreasonably impact on the amenity of adjoining houses.

11.28 Haulage Route

11.29 The observation made to the Board in relation to the appeal makes the point that the proposed haulage route is unsafe.

11.30 The planning authority in its request for additional information (see point 3 of the request dated 27th May 2015) in relation to the haulage route and again in the request for clarification of the additional information (see point 2 of the request dated 24th July 2015).

11.31 The applicant submitted a route coming north along the M11 from Rosslare to the junction with the local road as Coolbeg about 4kms from the site, along the Glenealy/M11 link public road to the site entrance. The planning authority and the observers have a reasonable concern about the element of this route from the M11 junction and Coolbeg to the site entrance. The eastern end, say about 1.5k as it approaches Coolbeg bridge is reasonably good but there is a stretch of about 2k immediately to the east of the site entrance which is narrow, without footpaths and has poor horizontal and vertical alignment as it climbs the eastern side of the high ground in Kilnamanaghmore.

11.32 On the other hand wind energy development of its nature is often confined to upland areas where public road access is problematical and may require careful manoeuvring. I consider that this is essentially a matter of a once-off delivery of a turbine which is a traffic management issue and does

not constitute a reasonable grounds for refusal of permission. I have attached a draft condition number 10 set out below requiring the payment of a bond to ensure that where damage occurs to the public road during construction works that monies are available to the roads authority for repairs.

11.33 Finally I note the comments of the Environment and Water Services report (see Michael Boland report dated 23rd July 2015) in relation to the delivery route *within* the site. I agree that there is an element of the access track within the site which is of poorer quality but this is a relatively small project which will not give rise to large volumes of either construction or maintenance traffic. I consider that this is largely a matter for the applicant without public safety or planning implications unless works are proposed to be carried out which require an additional planning permission which is outside the scope of the present application.

11.34 Shadow Flicker

11.35 The application included an assessment of shadow flicker. This assessment concluded that since there were no houses within 500m of the turbine that shadow flicker would not arise.

11.36 Having regard to the orientation of the turbine relative to the closest houses along the link road between Glenealy and the N11/M11 access, the separation distances and the intervention of the summit of Kilnamanagh hill I am satisfied that shadow flicker will not seriously impact on the amenity of houses in the area.

11.37 Appropriate Assessment - Screening

11.38 The application included an appropriate assessment screening report. The screening repot identified 10 European sites within 15km of the site. Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve cSAC is about 1km west of the proposed turbine and is identified as the only potential target for environmental effects arising from the proposed development.

11.39 Having regard to;

- The material submitted in the AA screening report submitted by the applicant and the screening assessment undertaken by the planning authority,
- The separation distances between the application site and Natura sites except the Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve cSAC (000717),

- The material published by the NPWS in relation to the Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve cSAC (000717) and in particular the conservation interest for which it has been designated *vis* Old sessile oak woods with *llex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles,
- The size and nature of the proposed development including the limited land take required by the proposed development,
- The limited nature of proposal as a source of emissions, the absence of pathways to transport any emissions to Natura 2000 sites and the distance from and nature of the conservation interests for which any Natura 2000 sites have been designated,

it is reasonable to conclude that on the basis of the information on the file, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on the Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve cSAC (000717) or any other European site, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives, and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (and submission of a NIS) is not therefore required.

12. RECOMMENDATION

Having regard to the foregoing I recommend a grant of permission for the reasons and considerations and subject to the conditions set out below.

Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the location of the site in an area designated as most favoured for wind energy development in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2010 to 2016, to its location below the summit of a local high point and remote from any view or prospect designated for protection in the County Development Plan, to the relatively modest nature of the proposed development and its distance from concentrations of residential development and subject to compliance with the conditions set out below it is considered that the proposed development will not be visually intrusive or seriously injure the amenity of residential property in the vicinity and will otherwise accord with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Conditions.

1. The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application as amended by the further plans and particulars submitted to the planning authority on 19th day of August 2015 and the 21st day of September 2015 except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. Drainage proposals shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works. Silt traps shall be provided on all surface water drainage channels. Details in this regard shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: To prevent water pollution.

3. (a) All oils and fuels shall be stored in an area bunded to 110% of the total volume of stored oils and fuels.

(b) Re-fuelling shall take place only within designated bunded areas, which shall be drained through an oil interceptor.

(c) A wheel wash shall be provided within the site, near the entrance to the public road.

(d) An appropriately sized facility shall be provided on site for concrete washings.

Revised drawings showing compliance with these requirements shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In order to protect water quality.

4. A Construction Method Statement in respect of all foundations works for the proposed turbine that takes full account of the underlying geology in the vicinity of the turbine shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In order to protect ground conditions and ensure turbine stability in the vicinity of the turbine.

5. Soil, rock and other material excavated during construction shall not be left stockpiled on site following completion of works. Details of treatment of stockpiled materials shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority, prior to the commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of the visual amenities of the area.

6. Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall submit to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority, details of the external finish and colour of the proposed turbine and ancillary structures. The external finishes shall be consistent with those of the existing turbines and ancillary structures on the adjacent lands to the south-west of the application site. Cables within the site shall be laid underground.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

7. This permission is for a period of 25 years from the date of this order unless, before the end of that period, a further grant of planning permission shall have been obtained for the continuation in use of the proposed development.

Reason: To enable the impact of the development to be reassessed, having regard to changes in technology and design during the 25 year period and to the circumstances then prevailing.

8. A Construction Stage Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. Any temporary works proposed along the route required to facilitate the construction stage traffic shall be identified in advance and form part of the Construction Stage Management Plan.

Reason: In the interest of road safety and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

9. Details of aeronautical requirements shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. Subsequently the developer shall inform the planning authority and the Irish Aviation Authority of the co-ordinates of the as constructed position of the turbine and the highest point of the turbine (to the top of the blade spin).

Reason: In the interest of air traffic safety.

10. The developer shall facilitate the archaeological appraisal of the site and shall provide for the preservation, recording and protection of archaeological materials or features which may exist within the site. In this regard, the developer shall:

(a) notify the planning authority in writing at least four weeks prior to the commencement of any site operation (including hydrological and geotechnical investigations) relating to the proposed development, and

(b) employ a suitably-qualified archaeologist prior to the commencement of development. The archaeologist shall assess the site and monitor all site development works.

The assessment shall address the following issues: (i) the nature and location of archaeological material on the site, and

(ii) the impact of the proposed development on such archaeological material.

A report, containing the results of the assessment, shall be submitted to the planning authority and, arising from this assessment, the developer shall agree in writing with the planning authority details regarding any further archaeological requirements (including, if necessary, archaeological excavation) prior to commencement of construction works. In default of agreement on any of these requirements, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

Reason: In order to conserve the archaeological heritage of the area and to secure the preservation (in-situ or by record) and protection of any archaeological remains that may exist within the site.

11. On decommissioning of the wind turbine, or if the turbine ceases operation for a period of more than one year, the turbine and associated structures (including foundations) shall be removed and all decommissioned structures and access road shall be removed within three months of decommissioning.

Reason: To ensure the satisfactory reinstatement of the site upon cessation of the project.

12. Prior to commencement of development, the developer shall lodge with the planning authority a cash deposit, a bond of an insurance company, or such other security as may be acceptable to the planning authority, to secure the reinstatement of public roads which may be damaged by the transport of materials to the site, coupled with an agreement empowering the planning authority to apply such security or part thereof to the satisfactory reinstatement of the public road. The form and amount of the security shall be as agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of agreement, shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

Reason: In the interest of road safety and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

13. The developer shall pay to the planning authority a financial contribution in respect of public infrastructure and facilities benefiting development in the area of the planning authority that is provided or intended to be provided by or on behalf of the authority in accordance with the terms of the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The contribution shall be paid prior to the commencement of development or in such phased payments as the planning authority may facilitate and shall be subject to any applicable indexation provisions of the Scheme at the time of payment. Details of the application of the terms of the Scheme shall be agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of such agreement, the matter shall be referred to the Board to determine the proper application of the terms of the Scheme.

Reason: It is a requirement of the Planning and Development Act 2000 that a condition requiring a contribution in accordance with the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Act be applied to the permission.

Hugh Mannion, Planning Inspector 1st March 2016