



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-320816-24

Development	Telecommunications support structure with fenced compound together with associated site works.
Location	Coillte Forest, Ballybrew, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow
Planning Authority	Wicklow County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	24/60382
Applicant(s)	Signal Infrastructure Limited
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse
Type of Appeal	First-Party
Appellant(s)	Signal Infrastructure Limited
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	15 th April 2025.
Inspector	Catherine Hanly

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located on Coillte forestry lands in the townland of Ballybrew, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. The site is located at an elevated point to the southern side of Glencullen Mountain at an elevation of 370 m. The surrounding landscape is rural and largely mountainous terrain. The closest settlement is Kilmalin which is located approximately 1.3 km to the southeast and then Enniskerry which is located further east.
- 1.2. Access to the site is provided via a forestry entrance and access track which is located off Boranaraltry Lane to the north west of the site.
- 1.3. The site and the immediate surrounding area contains conifer species. Tree felling of the forest has commenced adjacent to the site (to the south east). The site measures 0.04 hectares.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development comprises the following:
- Installation of a 30 m multi-user lattice type telecommunications support structure with headframe, carrying antenna and dishes enclosed within a 2.4 metre high palisade fenced compound
 - Associated ground equipment cabinets
 - Associated site works
 - An extension to an existing forest access track within Coillte forestry

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

- 3.1.1. Notification of the Decision to Refuse Permission was issued on 20th August 2024, for 1 no. reason:

3.1.2. *“Having regard to*

(i) the location of the development at an elevated location in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in views from the north, east and south east,

(ii) The site layout which will require the removal of trees to facilitate the development, and the lack of any proposal for the retention of the adjoining forestry, coupled with the proposals for clear felling of this area by Coillte.

(iii) the provisions of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 as set out in CPO 17.35, and Appendix 1 which seeks to ensure that development shall have regard to the County landscape classification hierarchy, and ensure through appropriate siting and design that developments along local roads will not be conspicuous or have a disproportionate or dominating visual impact on the surrounding environment as seen from the local scenic routes and settlements, and that Masts and base stations should be sited in a manner which respects the landscape and which limits the intrusion on the landscape.

- 3.1.3. *It is considered that the proposed development will have a negative visual impact, would seriously interfere with the character of the landscape which it is necessary to preserve, would be contrary to the provisions of the County Development Plan 2022-2028, and to proper planning and sustainable development.”*

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

- The site sits at an elevation of 370 m with Prince Williams Seat at 607 m to the west.
- The structure will sit on a hilltop and will be visible to a wide area, in particular from the north, east and southeast (i.e. Rocky Valley Drive and Ballinagee). The development would also be significant in view towards Glencullen from parts of the Wicklow Way Route (in Dun Laoghaire).
- The visual assessment identifies that the retention of trees would allow for the cabinets and up to c. 22 m of the structure to be concealed. However, there are no proposals or consents to retain trees around the site.
- Coillte Interactive Mapping identifies the area around the site to be clear felled in 2024. Therefore, the development must be seen in the absence of the trees currently on site.

- The development would form a visually intrusive feature in this sensitive landscape and would add to the deterioration of the sensitive landscape.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council: The development would not adversely impact the zoning objective of the G zoned lands which seeks to protect and improve high amenity areas.
- Bray District Engineer: No objection subject to the provision of adequate measures being put in place to intercept and adequately manage surface water run-off from the extended roadway and compound area so as not to contribute to downstream flooding or pollution of watercourses.
- Planning, Development and Environment: No objection subject to condition to ensure that no deleterious matter enters any surface waterbodies in the vicinity.
- Roads: No observations.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

3.3.1. None.

3.4. Third Party Observations

3.4.1. No observations were received by the Planning Authority.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. There is no planning history on the subject site.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

Communications and Energy

5.1.1. CPO 16.35: *“To facilitate and support the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and the development/expansion of communication, information and broadcasting*

networks, including mobile phone networks, broadband and other digital services, subject to environmental and visual amenity constraints.”

- 5.1.2. CPO 16.37: *“The development of new masts and antennae shall be in accordance with the development standards set out in Appendix 1 of this plan.”*

Natural Heritage and Biodiversity

- 5.1.3. The site is located in the Mountain and Lakeshore Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the North Eastern Valley/ Glencree area.

- 5.1.4. Section 17.3 describes this area as follows:

- 5.1.5. *“This area is situated along the northern extremities of the County and is based around the drainage pattern of the Glencree and Dargle Rivers and the surrounding road network. This area is very scenic, with attractive views and number of tourist attractions such as Powerscourt House and Demesne, Charleville Demesne and Glencree Drive. This landscape provides for extensive forested areas made up of both coniferous and deciduous woodlands.”*

- 5.1.6. CPO 17.35: *“All development proposals shall have regard to the County landscape classification hierarchy in particular the key landscape features and characteristics identified in the Wicklow Landscape Assessment (set in Volume 3 of the 2016 County Development Plan) and the ‘Key Development Considerations’ set out for each landscape area set out in Section 5 of the Wicklow Landscape Assessment.”*

- 5.1.7. CPO 17.36: *“Any application for permission in the AONB which may have the potential to significantly adversely impact the landscape area shall be accompanied by a Landscape / Visual Impact Assessment, which shall include, inter alia, an evaluation of visibility and prominence of the proposed development in its immediate environs and in the wider landscape, a series of photos or photomontages of the site / development from clearly identified vantage points, an evaluation of impacts on any listed views / prospects and an assessment of vegetation / land cover type in the area (with particular regard to commercial forestry plantations which may be felled thus altering character / visibility). The Assessment shall demonstrate that landscape impacts have been anticipated and avoided to a level consistent with the sensitivity of the landscape and the nature of the designation.”*

- 5.1.8. CPO 17.37: *“To resist development that would significantly or unnecessarily alter the natural landscape and topography, including land infilling / reclamation projects or projects involving significant landscape remodelling, unless it can be demonstrated that the development would enhance the landscape and / or not give rise to adverse impacts.”*
- 5.1.9. CPO 17.38: *“To protect listed views and prospects from development that would either obstruct the view / prospect from the identified vantage point or form an obtrusive or incongruous feature in that view / prospect. Due regard will be paid in assessing development applications to the span and scope of the view / prospect and the location of the development within that view / prospect.”*
- 5.1.10. The following views of Special Amenity Value or Special Interest are of relevance:

	Origin of View	Description
1	R117 at The Scalp, Enniskerry	View of Sugarloaf Mountains and Enniskerry
2	L1011 at Curtlesown, Glencree Drive	View of Bray Head, Sugarloaf Mountain and Djouce Mountain
3	L5507 Ballyman Road, Enniskerry	View of the Scalp and the Scalp Valley from Ballyman
4	The lands near Monastery House	View south towards Djouce Mountain
5	From the Glencree Road	View towards Carrigollgan
6	Summerhill House Hotel	View towards the Cookstown Valley and Ballyman Glen
7	From Cookstown Road	View towards the Great Sugarloaf Mountain

- 5.1.11. The following prospects are of relevance:

	Origin	Feature
1	L1011, L1015 & L5014, Glencree	Prospect of mountain area around Glencree Drive, Prince William Seat, Glencree River and Sugarloaf Mountain
2	L1013 Glencree Drive South	Prospect of Tonduff mountain and Glencree river valley. View to east of Sugarloaf Mountain
4	L1033, Rocky Valley Drive	Prospect downhill from the road to the west, north and northeast towards Powerscourt, Enniskerry and Bray

5.1.12. Appendix 1 – Section 2.4 Telecommunications

5.1.13. Need for the New Installation

“All applications for new antennae shall be accompanied by adequate information to show that there is a requirement for the new installation. In particular, the following information shall be provided:

- *Map of the area concerned (minimum 10km radius) showing all antennae operated by the applicant and the applicant’s existing coverage in that area;*
- *Details of antennae operated by other providers in the area;*
- *Details of the area to be covered by the proposed antennae and technical explanation of the reasons why coverage cannot be provided by existing antennae.*

Location

Where it has been proven that there is a need for new / expanded coverage in a particular area, the applicant shall show that all existing masts and support structures in the area have been firstly examined to determine if the attachment of

new antennae to existing support structures can provide the coverage required. This will require the submission of:

- A map of all existing support structures in the vicinity of the coverage ‘gap’;*
- A technical evaluation of the capabilities of these masts to take additional antennae and provide the coverage required.*

Once it has been determined that new antennae / antennae support structures are required and co-location on an existing support structure is not feasible, permission will be considered for new support structures and associated base stations subject to the following control criteria.

Locations in settlements

The applicant shall be required to follow a ‘sequential’ approach to site location i.e. in accordance with the order of priority set out to follow, the applicant must show that the preferred locations have been examined in the first instance and rejected for specified reasons (commercial competition in this instance will not be acceptable as a reason) and only then, can locations further down in the hierarchy be considered:

- 1. Clustering with existing support structures;*
 - 2. In industrial estates or on industrial zoned lands;*
 - 3. Rooftop locations in commercial / retail zones;*
 - 4. In parks / open space areas (‘disguised’ masts may be requested in such areas).*
- New support structures shall not be permitted within or in the immediate surrounds of a residential area or beside schools.*

Impacts on protected structures, Architectural Conservation Areas, National Monuments or other building / sites of heritage value shall be considered.

Rural Locations

- Masts and base stations should be sited in a manner which respects the landscape and which limits the intrusion on the landscape. Notwithstanding coverage obligation issues*
 - Hilltops shall generally be avoided, except in exceptional circumstances, where technical or coverage requirements make it essential.*
 - Locations in the direct line of listed views or prospects shall be avoided;*

- *Along major tourist routes, care shall be taken to avoid terminating views;*
- *The location of structures, archaeological sites and sites designated for nature conservation reasons (e.g., NHAs, SACs, SPAs) shall be considered against the conservation objectives of these sites 9;*
- *Forested locations are likely to be preferable, subject to the nature of the forestry and its felling programme. In such cases, the applicant must be in a position to maintain a suitable cordon of trees around the site and bonded undertakings to that affect will be required to be submitted;*
- *Unless otherwise advised through pre-planning discussions, a visual impact assessment shall be submitted with any application, which shall address, inter alia,*
 - *Landscape and topography, elevation and overall visibility;*
 - *Any listed views or prospects in the area;*
 - *Intermediate objects (e.g. buildings or trees) between the site and the principal viewing locations;*
 - *The scale of the object in the wider landscape;*
 - *The multiplicity of other objects in the wider panorama;*
 - *The position of the object with respect to the skyline;*
 - *Weather and lighting conditions.*

5.2. **Landscape Assessment, Appendix 5 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 – 2022.**

5.2.1. “1(d) – The North Eastern Valley/ Glencree

This area is situated along the northern extremities of the County and is based around the drainage pattern of the Glencree and Dargle Rivers and the surrounding road network. This area is very scenic, with attractive views and number of tourist attractions such as Powerscourt House and Demesne, Charleville Demesne and Glencree Drive. This landscape provides for extensive forested areas made up of both coniferous and deciduous woodlands.”

5.2.2. Section 5.3.1 states that applications for permission within open or highly scenic areas may be required to be accompanied by a Visual Impact Assessment.

- 5.2.3. Key features of the Glencree/ Glencullen area include environmental designation, mixed forestry, river valleys, views and prospects, varying topography, sporadic housing and cultural heritage.
- 5.2.4. The site key development considerations for the Glencree/ Glencullen area are as follows (Appendix 4 Map 10.13 (b)):
1. To protect listed views and vantage points across the valley and to resist development proposals that would negatively impact on the valley setting and views from the west at Glencree towards the Great Sugar Loaf.
 2. To maintain and preserve views across the valley towards the Wicklow Mountains.
 3. Through appropriate siting and design to ensure that developments along local roads will not be conspicuous or have a disproportionate or dominating visual impact on the surrounding environment as seen from the local scenic routes and settlements.
 4. To protect and facilitate the conservation of structures, sites and objects which are part of the County's cultural heritage, whether or not such structures, sites and objects are included on the Record Protected Structures.

5.3. Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (*Dún Laoghaire CDP*)

- 5.3.1. Policy Objective GIB6: Views and Prospects: *"It is a Policy Objective to preserve, protect and encourage the enjoyment of views and prospects of special amenity value or special interests, and to prevent development, which would block or otherwise interfere with Views and/or Prospects."*

5.4. National Policy

- 5.4.1. National Planning Framework (NPF) – Project Ireland 2040:
- 5.4.2. Objective 24 – *"Support and facilitate delivery of the National Broadband Plan as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development for those who live and work in rural areas."*

5.5. Regional Policy

5.5.1. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly 2019 – 2031:

5.5.2. Regional Policy Objective 8.25 seeks to support and facilitate the delivery of the National Broadband Plan.

5.6. **National Guidance**

5.6.1. Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (1996):

5.6.2. The *Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (1996 Guidelines)* sets out government policy for the assessment of proposed new telecommunications structures.

5.6.3. The support structure should be kept to the minimum height consistent with effective operation. The *1996 Guidelines* also state that visual impact is among the more important considerations that should be considered assessing a particular application.

5.6.4. The *1996 Guidelines* state that “*in rural areas towers and masts can be placed in forestry plantations provided of course that the antennae are clear of obstructions. This will involve clearing of the site but in the overall will reduce visual intrusion. Softening of the visual impact can be achieved through judicious choice of colour scheme and through the planting of shrubs, trees etc as a screen or backdrop.*”

5.6.5. The *1996 Guidelines* state that some masts will remain quite noticeable despite best precautions.

5.6.6. The *1996 Guidelines* state that “*all applicants will be encouraged to share and will have to satisfy the authority that they have made a reasonable effort to share.*” The *1996 Guidelines* further states that “*where it is not possible to share a support structure the applicant should, where possible, be encouraged to share a site or to site adjacently so that masts and antennae may be clustered.*”

5.7. **Circular PL07/12 – Telecommunications Antennae & Support Structure Guidelines**

5.7.1. This Circular was issued to Planning Authorities in 2012 and updated some of the sections of the above *1996 Guidelines* including ceasing the practice of limiting the life of the permission by attaching a planning condition. It also reiterates the advice in

the 1996 Guidelines that planning authorities should not determine planning applications on health grounds and states that, “*Planning authorities should be primarily concerned with the appropriate location and design of telecommunications structures and do not have competence for health and safety matters in respect of telecommunications infrastructure. These are regulated by other codes and such matters should not be additionally regulated by the planning process*”.

5.8. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.8.1. The following distances are noted between the site and natural heritage designations:

Site	Distance from the Subject Site
Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation	0.486 km
Wicklow Mountains Special Protected Area	0.932 km
Knocksink Wood Special Area of Conservation	0.97 km
Ballyman Glen Special Area of Conservation	3.117 km
Powerscourt Woodland Proposed Natural Heritage Area	1.48 km
Glencree Valley Proposed Natural Heritage Area	3.4 km
Great Sugar Loaf Proposed Natural Heritage Area	4.6 km
Bray Head Special Area of Conservation	8 km
Glenasmole Valley Special Area of Conservation	9.5 km

5.9. EIA Screening

- 5.9.1. I refer the Board to Appendix 1 – Form 1 EIA Pre-Screening of this report.
- 5.9.2. Having regard to the nature of the development comprising a telecommunications structure and ancillary development, the nature of the receiving environment and the absence of any connectivity to any sensitive location, there is no real likelihood of any significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development.

The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

6.1.1. A First-Party appeal has been lodged in this instance by Signal Infrastructure Ltd. The grounds of appeal can be summarised as follows:

Justification for the Development

- The site is required to improve voice and data services in the Enniskerry area, including the village of Kilmolin. By adding infrastructure capacity, it will allow all the wireless operators provide services in the area and therefore increase competition for such services.
- The proposed installation will interconnect with the established telecommunications network system that Three operates in Enniskerry.
- The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) published outdoor mobile phone coverage maps which identify that outdoor coverage at 4G and 5G service is fringe and non-existent in Enniskerry.
- The maps also identify that there are areas with no coverage surrounding the site.
- The installation of a multi-user structure will extend coverage for other operators into rural areas and improve services for the local community.
- Three specifically require a new site in the Enniskerry area.
- The site was chosen as the best candidate site in the search ring of the area to meet the requirements of all parties, including planning, radio coverage, legal tenure and so no other candidate was considered.

Discounted Structures

- There are 4 no. telecommunications bases in the area.

- The first site is located in the Powerscourt Estate. This site is discounted because the antennas located on the building are not at a suitable elevation for sufficient coverage.
- The second site is in the Powerscourt Estate. This site is discounted because it would not provide any additional coverage benefit to the blackspot area to the north.
- The third site is at the Garda mast in Enniskerry Village. This site is discounted because the structure operates for Garda communications and cannot be modified to allow for additional equipment on the upper section.
- The fourth site is an antenna on an electricity pylon. This is discounted because pylons are now deemed unsuitable for Wireless Antenna and Transmission equipment on health and safety grounds.

Design

- The tower infrastructure provider agrees to design and to construct an installation according to the Operators exact specification, which will then be leased on a long term basis.
- Once built, the tower will be offered to all other wireless network providers to maximise co-location.

Forestry

- The development is in accordance with Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 1996 (*Telecommunications Guidelines*).
- Section 7.3 of the Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures Guidelines states that in rural areas, towers and masts can be placed in forestry plantations.
- The structure proposed is a multi-user monopole type antenna support structure located in a large conifer forestry plantation operated by Coillte, located within a wider forested area covering Glencullen Mountain.
- The forestry surrounding the site has been approved for clear-felling under licence. It is expected that the site will be clear felled as part of Coillte

management programme in 2024 and replanted in 2025. It is a like for like replanting scheme and Sitka Spruce will be replanted.

- Sitka Spruce is a fast growing commercial tree with an average growing height of c. 1.5 m per year.
- In the short term the site will be exposed however the trees will begin to screen the lower compound within 2 years and within 5 – 10 years will conceal the towers height.
- The forestry and mountainous backdrop will absorb some of the impact the structure creates. Replanting and tree growth over time reduce the overall impact such that it will not intrude overly on the general view of the hillside.
- Section 4.3 of the Telecommunications Guidelines acknowledge that there is limited flexibility as regards location, given the constraints arising from radio planning parameters. As a new structure is required in the Enniskerry, the site is considered the most appropriate in which to position the structure in line with the guidelines.

Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028

- The landscape where the site is located is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The development would affect all of the assessed receptors to some degree.
- The L1011 protected projects and the Wicklow Way to the west would remain unaffected.
- The most affected views are to the north and east through introduction of new industrial materials
- The clear felling of the area will mean the structure is exposed in the short term and will remain in forestry in the foreseeable future.
- Policy recommends forestry locations for telecommunication structures to avoid locating in villages.
- The visual impact assessment determines that the impacts with mitigation measures range from imperceptible to moderate.

- Telecommunication structures create visual impacts, and these are necessary to provide essential infrastructure.

6.2. Planning Authority Response

6.2.1. No response was received.

6.3. Observations

6.3.1. No observations were received.

7.0 Assessment

7.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the reports of the local authority, and having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant local/regional/national policies and guidance, I consider that the substantive issues in this appeal to be considered are as follows:

- Site Selection
- Visual Impact

7.2. Site Selection

Co-Location

7.2.1. The First-Party has identified that there are 4 no. sites in the wider area in the Powerscourt Estate, at the Garda mast in Enniskerry village and on an electricity pylon to the east of Enniskerry. I note the reasonings presented, which are summarised above in section 6.1.1, as to why the 4 no. sites are not suitable for the co-location of equipment. I am therefore satisfied that the applicant has suitably justified their reasonings as to why the co-location of equipment is not suitable at any of the existing 4 no. sites.

Forestry Site

7.2.2. Section 2.4 in Appendix 1 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (*Wicklow CDP*), sets out the development criteria for telecommunication developments.

- 7.2.3. In relation to the provision of telecommunication structures in rural locations, the *Wicklow CDP* states that “*notwithstanding coverage obligation issues hilltops shall generally be avoided, except in exceptional circumstances, where technical or coverage requirements make it essential*”.
- 7.2.4. The subject site is located on a hilltop. The First-Party has stated that the proposed development will extend voice and data services over a wider coverage footprint than currently exists. The First-Party further states that the subject site was identified as the best candidate site in the search ring of the area to meet the requirements of all parties, including planning, radio coverage, legal tenure and so no other candidate was considered.
- 7.2.5. In consideration of the above justification and the *Wicklow CDP* which states that telecommunication developments on hilltops shall generally be avoided, I am not satisfied that the First-Party has justified that technical or coverage requirements make development on the subject site essential. The First-Party has stated that no other candidate site was considered. As such, it is not clear if technical or coverage requirements could be met at an alternative site in the area which is not located on a hilltop location.

7.3. **Visual Impact**

Views and Prospects in Wicklow County Council

- 7.3.1. The site is located in the Mountain and Lakeshore Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the North Eastern Valley/ Glencree area in Wicklow. I note CPO 17.35 in the *Wicklow CDP* which states that development proposals shall have regard to the County landscape classification hierarchy in particular the key landscape features and characteristics identified in the Wicklow Landscape Assessment (set in Volume 3 of the 2016 County Development Plan) and the ‘Key Development Considerations’ set out for each landscape area.
- 7.3.2. I also note Appendix 1 of the *Wicklow CDP* which states the following:
- “Masts and base stations should be sited in a manner which respects the landscape and which limits the intrusion on the landscape. Notwithstanding coverage obligation issues*

- *Hilltops shall generally be avoided, except in exceptional circumstances, where technical or coverage requirements make it essential.*
- *Locations in the direct line of listed views or prospects shall be avoided;*
- *Along major tourist routes, care shall be taken to avoid terminating views;*

- 7.3.3. I note that key features of the Glencree/ Glencullen area as set out in Volume 3 of the 2016 Wicklow County Development Plan, include views and prospects. I also note that key development considerations for the Glencree/ Glencullen area include protecting listed views and vantage points across the valley.
- 7.3.4. The Planning Authority notes that the site will be visible in views to a wide area, in particular in views from the north and east. The Planning Authority also note that the development will be seen from views to the southeast and to the north from Glencullen which forms part of the Wicklow Way Route.
- 7.3.5. In accordance with CPO 17.36 of the *Wicklow CDP*, the First-Party submitted a Visual Impact Assessment to the Planning Authority. The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment states that given the area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together with the SPA and SAC designations, Protected Views/ Prospects and the recreational value of the area, the landscape and visual amenity of the area has a very high sensitivity rating.
- 7.3.6. I have examined the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and note the visibility of the site across open views as viewed from the north along the R116 and R117. From the east of the site, the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment identifies that views vary from restricted, to open, to intermittent. Considering the recent and ongoing felling of the forestry surrounding the site, I further note the visibility of the subject site from amenity areas to the west and south, including the Wicklow Way and Powerscourt House and golf course. I further note that these views will be sensitive to change, given the proposed changes to the ridgeline and introduction of new materials.
- 7.3.7. I note the views of special amenity value or special interest as shown on map no. 17.10A in the *Wicklow CDP*. I note that the site sits at an elevation of 370 m with Prince Williams Seat at 607 m to the west. Having regard to the elevated nature of the site, the proposed height of the structure at 30 m and the recent and ongoing

felling of forestry surrounding the site, I consider that the development as proposed on an exposed hilltop location would form an incongruous feature in view nos. 1, 3 and 5 as shown on map no. 17.10A in the *Wicklow CDP*. As such, I am not satisfied that the development accords with CPO 17.38 of the *Wicklow CDP*, in that the development would form an obtrusive view feature in view nos. 1, 3 and 5 as shown on map no. 17.10A in the *Wicklow CDP*.

Views from Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council

7.3.8. I note the site's proximity to the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council boundary line to the north. The *Dún Laoghaire CDP* identifies views which are to be preserved from the southwest of Barrack Road where it joins Bridge Road. Viewpoint no. 16 in the Visual Impact Appraisal identifies the view from this direction. Viewpoint no. 16 identifies that a large portion of the telecommunication structure would be screened by the forestry. However, given that work has commenced felling the forestry surrounding the site, the screening provided by the forestry is no longer applicable. The *Dún Laoghaire CDP* also identifies views which are to be preserved from the west of the Ballybettagh Road close to the southern council boundary line where the road becomes the Killegar Road. Views to the west of Ballybettagh Road offer open and expansive views from where the subject site on the hilltop can be viewed. As such, I consider that the proposed development would not accord with Policy Objective GIB6 in the *Dún Laoghaire CDP*, in that the development would interfere with a view of special amenity value and would create an obtrusive feature on an elevated site in an area with wide reaching views.

7.3.9. To conclude, I consider that the development would form a visually intrusive feature in this sensitive landscape when viewed from the surrounding areas. Whilst I understand the First-Party's justification to provide the development which will provide essential infrastructure to local communities, I do not consider that it can be to the detriment of the sensitive landscape.

Forested Locations

7.3.10. I also note that Appendix 1 of the *Wicklow CDP* which states that when developing telecommunications in rural areas, "*forested locations are likely to be preferable, subject to the nature of the forestry and its felling programme. In such cases, the*

applicant must be in a position to maintain a suitable cordon of trees around the site and bonded undertakings to that effect will be required to be submitted”.

- 7.3.11. As noted in the report from the Planning Authority, there are no proposals or consents to retain trees around the site. I note from the Coillte Interactive Web Map Viewer that a felling licence was submitted DAFM under reference number WW02-FL0122 in 2024 and the forestry was proposed to be felled in 2024. From my site inspection, I noted that work has commenced on felling the forestry adjacent to the site.
- 7.3.12. I note the response from the First-Party in the grounds of appeal, which states that the site will be replanted and that over time the screening of the lower section of the tower and compound will be achieved in the short term (2 years) and that over the long term (5 – 10 years) it will be fully screened. However, I disagree with this statement. Upon review of the Visual Impact Appraisal, it is evident that even prior to the removal of the forestry surrounding the site, the structure was never fully screened and was still evident above the forestry (Viewpoint 1, 2, 5 and 16). Having regard to the height and design of the 30 m multi-user lattice type telecommunications support structure and its siting on an exposed hilltop where forestry is in the process of being felled, I consider that the development fails to accord with Appendix 1 of the *Wicklow CDP*. The applicant has not been in a position to maintain a suitable cordon of trees surrounding the site and as such I am not satisfied that the development has been sited in a manner which respects the landscape and limits the intrusion on the landscape.

Conclusion

- 7.3.13. I consider that the proposed development fails to accord with Appendix 1 of the *Wicklow CDP* in relation to masts. Noting the location of the telecommunication mast on a hilltop location and in direct line of listed views and the Wicklow Way, I consider that the mast has not be sited in manner which respects the landscape.

8.0 AA Screening

- 8.1. I have considered case ABP 320816-24 in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

- 8.2. The proposed development is located on forestry land and comprises the construction of a telecommunications support structure with fenced compound together with ground equipment cabinets and an extension to an existing forest access track within Coillte Forestry. The closest European Sites, part of the Natura 2000 Network, is the Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation which is located 0.48 km from the site, the Wicklow Mountains Special Protected Area which is located 0.9 km from the site and the Knocksink Wood Special Area of Conservation which is located 0.97 km from the site.
- 8.3. I note the report from the Planning, Development and Environment department in Wicklow County Council which noted that the nearest watercourse is 500 m to the south through existing forestry which is a tributary to the Dargle River. The report states that there may be linkages to the tributary via existing drainage channels from construction works on the proposed new access lane and compound. I note that the report had no objection to the proposed development and recommended a condition requiring that no deleterious matter enters any surface waterbodies in the vicinity.
- 8.4. I also note the report from the Planning Authority which concluded that there are no direct or indirect connections to the Wicklow Mountains SAC or Wicklow Mountains SPA.
- 8.5. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because it could not have any effect on a European Site.
- 8.6. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:
- The distance from the European Sites
 - The absence of ecological pathways to any European Site.
 - The report from the Planning Authority.
- 8.7. I conclude, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. I recommend that planning permission should be refused for the reasons and considerations as set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. Having regard to the siting, design and overall height of the proposed development, on a hilltop location, where forestry is in the process of being removed, in the Mountain and Lakeshore Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the North Eastern Valley/ Glencree area in Wicklow, it is considered that the proposed telecommunications structure would constitute an obtrusive feature on an elevated site in an area with wide reaching views and would seriously injure the visual amenities of the area. Therefore, the proposed development, if permitted would conflict with objectives CPO 17.35 and 17.38 in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 -2028 and Policy Objective GIB6 in the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Plan 2022 – 2028.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Catherine Hanly
Planning Inspector

17th April 2025

11.0 Appendix 1 - Form 1 EIA Pre-Screening

An Bord Pleanála	ABP 320816-24		
Case Reference			
Proposed Development Summary	Telecommunications support structure with fenced compound together with associated site works.		
Development Address	Coillte Forest, Ballybrew, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	X
		No	
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?			
Yes			Proceed to Q3.
No	X		Tick if relevant. No further action required
3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?			
Yes	N/A	State the relevant threshold here for the Class of development.	
No	N/A		
4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?			

Yes		N/A.	
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5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No	X	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q4)
Yes		Screening Determination required

Inspector: _____ **Date:** _____