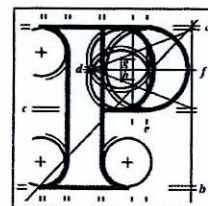


Our Case Number: ABP-316051-23

Planning Authority Reference Number:



**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Cllr. Vincent McCormack
2 Stoneleigh
Ballymore
Co. Westmeath

Date: 09 May 2023

Re: Renewable energy development comprising 9 no. wind turbines and associated infrastructure.
Umma More and adjacent townlands, County Westmeath.

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Bord Pleanála has received your observation or submission in relation to the case mentioned above and will take it into consideration in its determination of the matter. Please accept this letter as a receipt for the fee of €50 that you have paid.

Please be advised that copies of all submissions / observations received in relation to the application will be made available for public inspection at the offices of the Local Authority and at the offices of An Bord Pleanála when they have been processed by the Board.

For further information on this case please access our website at www.pleanala.ie and input the 6-digit case number into the search box. This number is shown on the top of this letter (for example: 303000).

Yours faithfully,

Niamh Thornton
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737247

BL50A

Teil
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Facs
Láithreán Gréasáin
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64 Sráid Maoilbhríde
Baile Átha Cliath 1
D01 V902

64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

To: The Secretary,
An Bord Pleanála,
64 Marlborough St.,
Dublin 1.
D01 V902.

2nd April, 2023.

Re: S.I.D Wind Farm Application, County Westmeath.
Applicants: Umma More Developments.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the Strategic Infrastructure Development (S.I.D) status which is sought by Umma More Renewable Energy Developments (hereinafter called 'the applicants') for the development of a wind farm in County Westmeath (hereinafter called 'the windfarm').

The applicants allege that this windfarm will contribute at least 50 MW of Energy to the National Grid and should be afforded strategic infrastructure development status in accordance with section 37 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

However, I wish to make the following observations, which I have placed in individual paragraphs for ease of reference:

Connection to the Grid:

The applicants admit in their summary that they may have difficulty obtaining connection to the National Grid at Mullingar. Instead the applicants indicate their intention to install over 30 km of cabling to connect their Windfarm to a Grid connection in Tullamore, Co. Offaly 'as their preferred option' (Non Technical Summary, M.K.O., p.9) However the applicants fail to provide any evidence that they have secured a connection to the Grid at Tullamore.

The Irish Energy Regulator known as the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) governs and regulates the grid connections. The applicants fail to provide any evidence that a Grid Connection has been obtained. If the Applicant is seriously contending that the energy to be generated from this wind farm is for the domestic grid, evidence of connection to the Grid should be supplied.

Furthermore, the applicants do not have planning permission for either the substantial cabling and sub-station which will be required to supply the energy to the alleged grid connection.

Westmeath County Development Plan:

The applicants confirm *'the importance of the current Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (WCDP) which came into effect on the 3rd May 2021 is relevant'* (Non -Technical Summary, MKO, p.5).

However, rather remarkably the applicants fails to address Policy Objective 10.146 in the Westmeath County Development Plan which requires the Council to:

"To strictly direct large-scale energy production projects, in the form of wind farms, onto cutover cutaway peatlands in the County, subject to environmental, landscape, habitats and wildlife protection requirements being addressed. In the context of this policy, industrial scale/large-scale energy production projects are defined as follows:

Projects that meet or exceed any of the following criteria:

- *Height: over 100m to blade tip, or*
- *Scale: More than five turbines, or*
- *Output: Having a total output of greater than 5MW Developments sited on peatlands have the potential to increase overall carbon losses.*

Proposals for such development should demonstrate that the following has been considered:

- *Peatland stability; and*
- *Carbon emissions balance*

(Westmeath County Development Plan, 2021-2027, CPO 10.146).

On this basis the current S.I.D application which is situate on agricultural land which is within close proximity to residential homes, is in direct contravention of the Current Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Set Back Distances:

Furthermore, Policy Objective 10.143 of the Westmeath County Development Plan obliges Westmeath County Council to provide the following setback distances between the wind turbines and residential dwellings as follows:

- 500 metres, where the tip height of the wind turbine blade is greater than 25 metres but does not exceed 50 metres.
- 1000 metres, where the tip height of the wind turbine blade is greater than 50 metres but does not exceed 100 metres.

- 1500 metres, where the tip height of the wind turbine blade is greater than 100 metres but does not exceed 150 metres.
- More than 2000 metres, where the tip height of the wind turbine blade is greater than 150 metres.

(Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, CPO 10.143)

The proposed turbines will have an overall ground-to-blade tip height of 185 metres, blade rotor diameter of 162 metres and hub height of 104 metres.

There is no evidence that the applicants have adhered to any of the setback distance requirements required by the County Development Plan, in their application.

Instead the applicants indicate that they are observing the the setback distances suggested in the 2006 Windfarm Guidelines. However, in 2019 the Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage commenced a targeted review of these 2006 guidelines in relation to the targeted issues of sound, noise and setback distances amongst other areas. This review was initiated nationally as the 2006 guidelines are generally recognized as not fit for purpose in the context of the scale of current Wind Farms.

Noise Monitoring:

Similarly, the applicants are obliged to comply with CPO 10.147 of the County Plan , when monitoring the noise generated by the development as follows:

Ensure that proposals for energy development demonstrate that human health has been considered, including those relating to the topics of:

- *Noise (including consistency with the World Health Organization's 2018 Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region);*

It is noted that the applicants have failed to present their noise assessments in accordance with the requirement of these WHO Guidelines.

Uisneach:

The applicants describe Uisneach as “a highly sensitive landscape” (Non-Technical Summary, M.K.O.,p.27).

The applicants also acknowledge that:

All turbines of the Proposed Development are likely to be visible from the top of the Hill of Uisneach where open views are permitted to the west.

(Landscape and Visual Assessment, M.K.O., Chapter 13.8.2)

And

There will be full theoretical visibility from the top of Uisneach and the Catstone (Landscape and Visual Assessment, M.K.O., Chapter 12.91)

Similarly, the applicants mention policy 13.7 of the Current County Development Plan which requires Westmeath County Council to:

Ensure that any significant, industrial and or infrastructural developments (excluding residential; agricultural buildings; tourism; greenway; cultural; educational or community buildings), which would impact upon Uisneach and or its protected views will not be permitted due to the sensitivity of the site.

Footnote: CPO constitutes a 'policy' of the Plan as envisaged under Section 1.1 of the plan

(Westmeath County Development Plan, 2021-2027, Policy 13.7)

However, the applicants then appear to contend that as the windfarm does not physically affect Uisneach, the proposed windfarm does not contravene policy 13.7. The applicants appeared to have over looked the final clause of this policy which states "or its protected views"

The applicants then suggest that the effect of the windfarm will be "slight/moderate" on Uisneach. However, the Wind Energy Guidelines 2006, upon which the applicants rely indicate that *'factors that can inform landscape sensitivity to wind energy development, include scenic quality, rarity, uniqueness and natural and cultural heritage considerations.* The applicants fail to supply the landscape sensitivity criteria upon which they are making this assessment.

In addition, the applicants suggest that the tree ridge/vegetation may have a mitigating effect/obscure the view. It is difficulty to envisage how a tree line/vegetation will obscure a wind turbine which exceeds 180 metres in height, particularly when vegetation on a tree ridge is only relevant during the summer months.

Although the applicants confirm that Uisneach has been designated as an area of High Amenity Status in the County Development Plan. The applicants also fail to highlight the High Amenity Area Policy Objectives, namely 13.20 to 13.28 contained in the County Development Plan which include inter alia, the following High Amenity Area Policy Objectives:

High Amenity Areas Policy Objectives:

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.20 Protect High Amenity areas from inappropriate development and reinforce their character, distinctiveness and sense of place.

CPO 13.21 Protect and preserve designated High Amenity Areas from inappropriate urban generated housing development or any other development which would be injurious to or detract from the natural amenity of Areas of High Amenity.

Westmeath County Development Plan, 2021-2027, CPO 13.20 and 13.21)

Uisneach measures approximately 180 metres in height; The proposed turbines with an overall ground-to-blade tip height of 185 metres, blade rotor diameter of 162 metres and hub height of 104 metres will undoubtedly dominate the landscape within which Uisneach is situate.

Summary:

The County development plan is a statutory document which is designed to guide the proper planning of the local authority. The Council, elected members and inhabitants living within the County are bound to adhere to its terms to ensure the proper and orderly planning within the County. The County development plan represents the culmination of a process of engagement which is inherent within modern democracies. The applicants contend that they are satisfying our commitment to renewables which is

contained in the County development Plan. However in many respects they appear to disregard or fail to address the other aforementioned key policies contained within our County development Plan.

As an elected member of the Council that participates in this democratic planning process on a daily basis, I would request that this development is not afforded Strategic Infrastructure Status.

Your faithfully,

Councillor Vincent. Mc Cormack,
2 Stoneleigh,
Ballymore,
Co. Westmeath.