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DESIGNING AND DELIVERING
A SUSTAINABLE FURTURE

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT (EIAR) FOR THE PROPOSED DREHID WIND FARM AND SUBSTATION, CO. KILDARE

VOLUME 2 – MAIN EIAR

CHAPTER 4 - POLICY

Prepared for:
North Kildare Wind Farm Ltd

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Core House, Pouladuff Road, Cork, T12 D773, Ireland
T: +353 21 496 4133 | E: info@ftco.ie
CORK | DUBLIN | CARLOW
www.fehilytimoney.ie

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4. POLICY

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter of the EIAR outlines current international, European, national, regional and local policy in combination with legislation which is relevant to the Proposed Development.

The Irish Planning Policy system is set within a hierarchical structure, as identified in Figure 4-1, overleaf. National policy is informed by EU Directives, Planning Legislation, Ministerial Guidelines, Government Policy and Capital programmes.

International and European legally binding agreements to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and to manage climate change internationally have been adopted into Ireland's national energy policy. This section of the EIAR outlines how these legally binding agreements are being facilitated through national energy and climate policy with a clear mandate to support onshore wind energy development within the state. The importance in complying with the national energy policy at a local level cannot be overstated if Ireland is to achieve its national renewable energy targets.

The latest SEAI figures indicate that Ireland has not met its targets up until 2020 under the First Renewable Energy Directive (RED1) and is not on track to meet its targets under the second Renewable Energy Directive (RED2) (SEAI, 2022)[1]. Furthermore, the recent increase in renewable electricity targets to 80% by 2030 indicates the need for significant escalation in renewable energy production in Ireland. The following Chapter sets out how the Proposed Development complies with national and local energy policy and will contribute towards Ireland's national renewable energy targets.

[1] https://www.seai.ie/publications/Energy-in-Ireland-2022.pdf

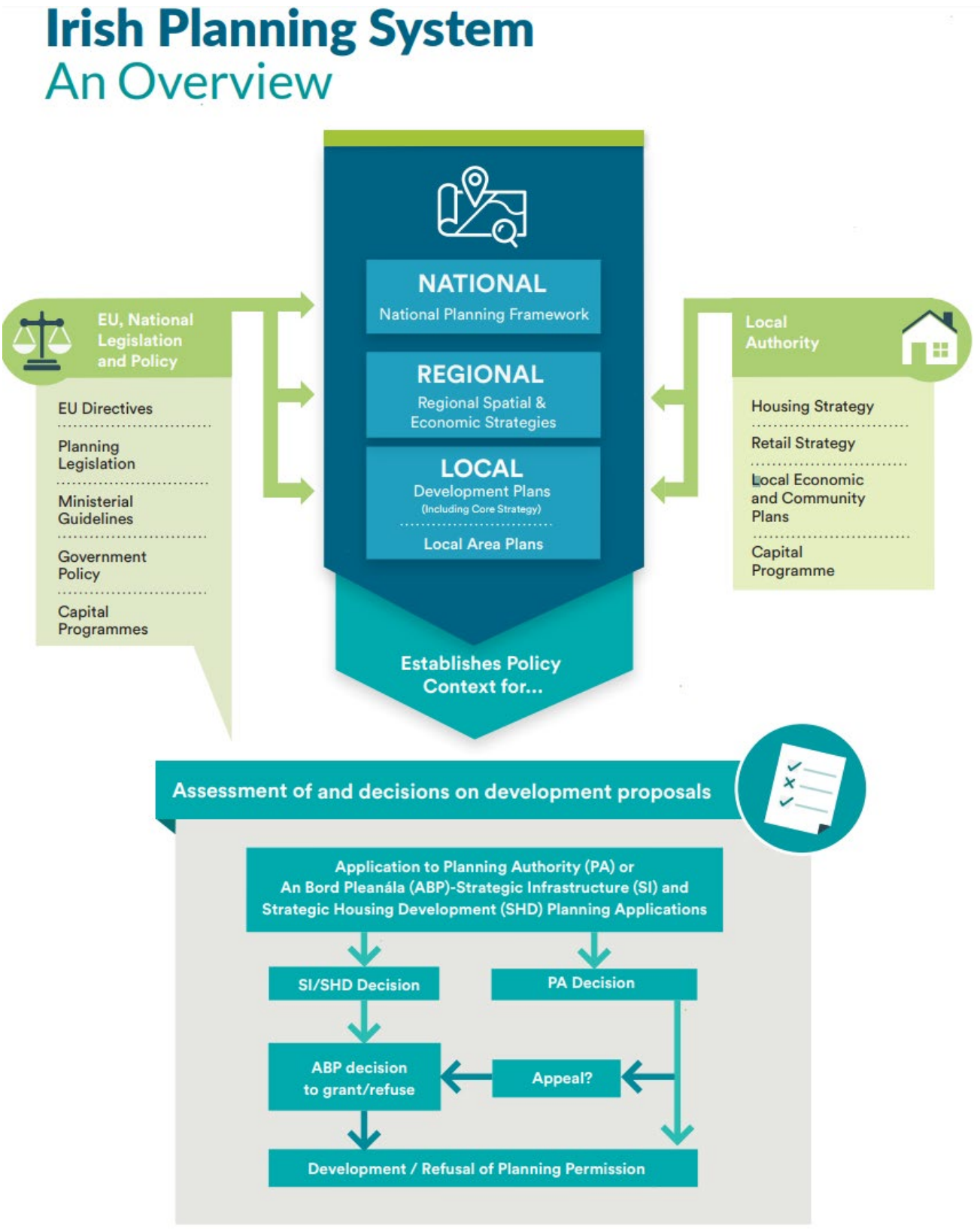

Figure 4-1: Irish Planning System – An Overview Extract from the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040

4.2 International Global Policies

4.2.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty negotiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its ultimate aim was to achieve "...*stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system*" (United Nations, 2013)[2]. There are 195 parties ratified to the Convention and these are subdivided into *Annex I*, *Annex II*, *Annex B*, *Non-Annex I* and *Least Developed Countries*.

The Framework Convention specified the aim of developed (Annex I) parties to stabilise their greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide and other anthropogenic greenhouse gases not regulated under the Montreal Protocol) at 1990 levels, by the year 2000. The treaty did not set any limits or binding targets, instead, it provided a framework for negotiating specific international treaties ("protocols") that set binding limits on greenhouse gases. It does, however, require all parties in Annex 1 to prepare and publish National Inventory Reports (NIRs) on emissions [Decision 3/CP.5]. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for the preparation of Ireland's NIR.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the highest body of the UNFCCC and consists of environment ministers who have met annually since 1995 to assess progress in dealing with the issue of climate change. At the latest Conference of the Parties, COP 29, which was held in Baku, Azerbaijan from the 11th to the 24th of November 2024, an agreement was reached for developed nations to pay up to $300 billion per year by 2035 to support climate efforts in developing countries. COP 29 also finalised rules for an international carbon market under the Paris Agreement but failed to agree on how to implement last year's pledge to transition away from fossil fuels, which was deferred to COP 30 in Brazil.

The *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) has put forward its clear assessment that the window for action on climate change is rapidly closing, and that renewable energy sources such as wind will have to grow from 30% of global electricity at present, to 80% by 2050 if we are to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels in accordance with previous COP agreements. COP 28 gave a renewed emphasis on climate action and the increasing viability and role of renewables such as wind energy to provide a more sustainable future. This was emphasised by a key outcome of COP28 which was the "*Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge*". Otherwise referred to as the '*COP28 Global Renewables And Energy Efficiency Pledge*', this pledge aims to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030, reaching at least 11,000 GW, with wind energy expected to be a major contributor to achieving this target.

The wind energy sector, represented by organizations like the *Global Wind Energy Council* (GWEC), actively participated in COP28, where they highlighted the advantages of wind power as a viable and sustainable means of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, boosting energy security, and creating jobs.

In light of the COP21 agreement in 2015, the Irish Government enacted the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015* and the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* which provides for the approval of plans by the Government in relation to climate change for the purpose of pursuing the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

[2] What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change? | UNFCCC

4.2.2 Kyoto Protocol

In 1997, the *Kyoto Protocol* set legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and two commitment periods were established. The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty which extends the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention. The Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 2005, as a result of which, emissions reduction targets agreed by developed countries, including Ireland are now binding.

The first commitment period (2008 - 2012) applied to emissions of six main greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulphur hexafluoride (SF6)), and set targets for:

- A 5% overall reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases in developed countries.
- An average 8% reduction below 1990 levels within the EU.

The 15 member states of the European Union at that time (the EU 15) and other European countries (some of which subsequently acceded to the EU) have individual GHG reduction and limitation targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

Ireland's contribution was a limit of 13% above 1990 greenhouse gas emission levels which corresponds to an average limit of 62.8 million tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2eq) per annum during the period 2008 – 2012. Countries not fulfilling their obligations were forced to purchase carbon credits on an open market from compliant countries.

The second commitment period, following the "Doha Amendment" to the Kyoto Protocol, applied to emissions from 2013 - 2020. All members of the European Union had binding targets in the second commitment period.

The EU 27 countries committed to reduce their GHG emissions by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels and to increase this commitment to a 30% reduction if other major emitting countries agree to similar targets under a global climate agreement.

Developing countries do not have binding targets under the Kyoto Protocol, but are still committed under the treaty to reduce their emissions. Actions taken by developed and developing countries to reduce emissions include support for renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and reducing deforestation.

One of the key mechanisms introduced under the Kyoto Protocol is the international emissions trading scheme which allows developed countries to trade their commitments. They can trade emissions quotas among themselves and can also receive credit for financing emissions reductions in developing countries.

The EU Emission Trading System (ETS) came into operation on 1 January 2005 and was introduced to allow Member States achieve their commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective way. It is the largest such scheme in the world and allows participants to buy or sell emission allowances which means that emission cuts can be achieved at least at cost.

The EU ETS is a 'cap and trade' scheme, in that it caps the overall level of emissions allowed but, within that limit, allows participants in the scheme to buy and sell allowances as they require. These allowances are the common trading 'currency' at the heart of the scheme. One allowance gives the holder the right to emit one tonne of CO_2 or the equivalent amount of another greenhouse gas (CO_2eq).

The categories of activity covered by the EU ETS are set out in Annex 1 of the principal Directive (2003/87/EC) and the greenhouse gases to which the Scheme applies to are set out in Annex II of the same Directive. While all six gases listed in Annex A of the Kyoto Protocol are included in Annex II, not all are in practical terms actually covered by the ETS and the listing of all in Annex II is perhaps a signal of the intention to extend the scheme in the future.

The Scheme operates in periodic cycles that have come to be known as 'phases' as the EU ETS scheme is open ended with no termination date specified. Phase 1 ran from 2005 - 2007 and was known as the commitment period, Phase 2 covered 2008 -2012 (the Kyoto Phase) and Phase 3 ran from 2013 – 2020, with this phase completing at the same date as the EU Commissions end date of 31 December 2020 for its own reduction in greenhouse gases.

Phase 4 runs from 2021-2030 and aims to improve the ETS as part of a revision to the ETS Directive concluded in 2018, to achieve the EU's 2030 emission reduction targets in line with the 2030 climate and energy policy framework and as part of the EU's contribution to the 2015 Paris Agreement (EU, 2019)[3]. New rules agreed as part of the 2018 revision of the ETS Directive required the legislation governing the auctions of emission allowances to be changed. The changes concern, in particular, the use of the common auction platform to monetise the allowances dedicated to the Innovation and Modernisation Fund. This phase will include a reduced emissions allowance at an annual rate of 2.2%, up from 1.74%, increasing each nation's need to cut emissions on an annual basis.

Further changes proposed for the ETS commenced in 2013 through Directive 2009/29/EC. In summary, member states will no longer draw up National Allocation Plans (NAPs) – instead, there will be a single EU-wide cap and allowances will be allocated on the basis of harmonised rules amongst other changes to the trading period etc.

4.3 EU Directives and Policies

This section summarises the previous policies and targets for renewable energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Europe up to 2020 in order to provide context and establish the progress made in Ireland over the past two decades to achieve these EU targets. The section then details the latest policies and targets with a view to 2030 and beyond. The various directives and policies of the EU set a clear mandate for each member state to transition to sustainable, renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is reflected in the theme of European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen's inaugural 'State of the Union' address delivered on 16 September 2020 which emphasised the need to transform the European economy and society to deal with the climate change emergency. It was also stated that the EU aims to reduce the EU's net greenhouse gas emission by at least 55% on 1990 levels by the end of this decade.

4.3.1 European Union Targets for 2020 and the Irish Context

The year 2020 was a significant milestone for renewable energy and emissions targets in Europe. The EU Directive on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources (2009/28/EC) set a target of 20% of EU energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020 and a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, the so-called 20:20:20 plan.

[3] Auctioning Regulation amendment for phase 4 of the EU ETS published and to enter into force (europa.eu)

As part of this Directive, Ireland's overall national target for the share of energy from renewable sources in gross final consumption of energy in 2020 was 16% (increased from 3.1% in 2005). For renewable electricity alone, Ireland set a national target of 40% by 2020 as outlined in the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP). The sectoral components of the overall 16% target are detailed in Table 4-1, which outlines each form of renewable energy supply (RES). The share of renewable energy for each component in the two years leading up to 2020 is also presented.

Table 4-1demonstrates that Ireland has made significant progress in achieving its 2020 renewable electricity targets. Wind energy accounted for 32% of all electricity generated in 2019, the largest contributor of renewable electricity in Ireland.

Table 4-1: Target and Current Share of Renewable Energy in Energy Sectors

Form of Renewable Energy Supply	2018 Position (SEAI, 2020)	2019 Position (SEAI, 2020a)	Target Share For 2020
Electricity (RES-E)	33.2%	36.5%	40%
Heat (RES-H)	6.5%	6.3%	12%
Transport (RES-T)	7.2%	8.9%	10%

Source: SEAI (2020), Renewable Energy in Ireland 2020 Update & SEAI (2020a), Energy in Ireland 2020 Report

In 2008, the EU agreed a climate and energy package that included a target to reduce GHG emissions across the EU by 20% below 1990 levels by the year 2020. This resulted in two pieces of European legislation focusing on reduction in GHG emissions. Directive 2009/29/EC requiring ETS companies to reduce their emissions by 21% below 2005 levels by 2020; and Decision 406/2009/EC which set out the minimum contribution of Member States for meeting greenhouse gas reductions which required Ireland to reduce non-ETS emissions by 20% below 2005 levels by 2020.

According to EPA (2022)[4], Ireland achieved approximately 13.6% reduction in GHG emissions compared to 2005 levels (the baseline). This included an approximate 35.4% reduction in GHG emissions in the energy sector, indicating renewable energy's significant contribution to the overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland.

Table 4-1, above, clearly outlines the progress made towards the 2020 targets, while making it abundantly clear renewable energy sources have contributed greatly to the achievement of Ireland's energy and emissions targets as set by the EU. This places Ireland in a strong position to continue this progress towards 2030 EU targets, as detailed in the following sections.

4.3.2 2030 Climate and Energy Framework

In October 2014 EU leaders adopted the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework (European Commission, 2014) which was subsequently updated in 2018. The framework provides a long-term perspective beyond 2020 targets. The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework sets out three key targets for the year 2030:

[4] www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/air-emissions/EPA-Ireland's-Provisional-GHG-Emissions-1990-2021_July-2022v3.pdf

- At least 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels)
- At least 32% share of renewable energy
- At least 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency.

Further to this the European Commission in 2016 published its 2030 emissions targets break down for each Member State. While the overall EU target is a reduction of 40% on 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, every Member State negotiates an individual target. Ireland will have to reduce its emissions by 30% relative to its 2005 emissions.

Ireland will have 4% one-off flexibility from emissions trading, at the highest end of the ranking. Ireland will have 5.6% flexibility from land use. This is a substantially larger margin than any other Member States except Latvia.

4.3.3 A Roadmap for Moving to a Competitive Low Carbon Economy in 2050

Looking beyond 2020 in compliance with the EC Energy Roadmap 2050, an EU target of at least 27% has been indicated as the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU in 2030. While the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) is currently examining the potential for diversifying Ireland's renewable technology mix in the post-2020 period, the Department recognises that; "*as a proven and cost effective technology, onshore wind will remain part of Ireland's generation portfolio out to 2030 and will help to meet Ireland's contribution to the binding EU-wide 2030 renewable energy target*"[5]. The Roadmap has informed national policy and has influenced the Climate Action Plan (2019) which sets out actions to reduce climate change towards 2050.

4.3.4 Clean Energy for all Europeans Package (2019)

Based on Commission proposals published in 2016, the EU decided to tackle the transition towards clean energy and a carbon-neutral economy by rewriting the EU's energy policy framework to facilitate a clean and fair energy transition and delivering the Clean Energy for all Europeans package in 2019. By providing a modern, stable legal environment and setting a clear and common sense of direction, the EU aims to stimulate the necessary public and private investment and bring European added value by addressing these challenges. As a package, the new rules will reinforce consumer rights, putting them at the heart of the energy transition and creating growth and green jobs in a modern economy. They will enable the EU to show leadership in the fight against climate change following the Paris Agreement.

The Clean energy for all Europeans package sets the right balance between making decisions at EU, national, and local level. Member States will continue to choose their own energy mix but must meet new commitments to improve energy efficiency and the take-up of renewables in that mix by 2030. For example, the new rules on the electricity market, which have been adopted, will make it easier for renewable energy to be integrated into the grid, encourage more inter-connections and cross-border trade, and ensure that the market provides reliable signals for future investment. Member States are required to draft plans to prevent, prepare for and manage possible crisis situations in the supply of electricity in coordination with neighbouring Member States, and to enhance the role of the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators.

[5]https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/compliance/C2014-112_Ireland/frComm_03.09.2017/frCommC122_03.09.2017_update_att_1_Information_Note_on_Review_of_the_Wind_Energy_Development_Guidelines.pdf

In December 2018, the recast Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001/EU entered into force, as part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package, aimed at keeping the EU a global leader in renewables and, more broadly, helping the EU to meet its emissions reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement. More recently, the EU adopted '*Directive (EU) 2023/2413*', known as *Renewable Energy Directive III* (RES III) on 20th November 2023.

4.3.5 Recast Renewable Energy Directives

In June 2018, an agreement was made in Europe between negotiators for the Commission, the European

Parliament, and the Council of the European Union regarding increasing renewable energy use in Europe. The new regulatory framework includes a binding renewable energy target for the EU for 2030 of 32% with an upwards revision clause by 2023. This agreement will help the EU meet the Paris Agreement goals. In terms of renewable energy production, the agreement has achieved:

- A new, binding EU renewable energy target of 32% by 2030, including a review clause by 2023 for an upward revision of the EU level target;
- Improved design and stability of renewable energy support schemes.

The revised renewable energy Directive 2018/2001/EU entered into force in December 2018.

Following on from RED II, the EU adopted '*Directive (EU) 2023/2413*', known as *Renewable Energy Directive III* (RES III) on 20th November 2023, with an aim to further increase its renewable energy ambitions. RES III replaces RES II and is in line with the '*European Green Deal* (2019), described in 4.3.4 below, and sets a new binding target of c. 42.5% renewable energy in the EU's total energy consumption by 2030, with an aspirational target of 45%. The aim of RES III is to introduce sector-specific targets for transport, heating, cooling, and industry to ensure a balanced contribution from all parts of the economy, and also included measures to streamline and accelerate the permitting process for renewable energy projects, addressing one of the major bottlenecks in the deployment of renewables. The transition from RES II to RES III reflects the EU's commitment to achieving higher renewable energy targets and facilitating clean energy.

4.3.6 European Green Deal (December 2019)

The European Green Deal is a growth strategy for the EU which aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, improving quality of life with a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. The EU aim to do this by becoming climate-neutral by 2050.

With regard to the supply of clean, affordable and secure energy, the European Green Deal underlines the fact that in order to meet the EU's climate and sustainability goals, all sectors must increase their use of renewable energy and phase out fossil fuels.

According to the 2030 Climate Target Plan[6], the EU aim to achieve a greenhouse gas emission reduction of at least 55% by the year 2030, compared to 1990 levels; in order to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. A key principle for achieving this will be to develop a power sector based largely on renewable resources.

[6] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0562

The EU Climate Law[7] obliges all EU institutions across all areas of competence, and the Member States, to work collectively to achieve the greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 55%.

4.3.7 European Climate Law (July 2021)

The European Climate Law, which entered into force on 29th July 2021, writes into law the goal set out in the European Green Deal for Europe's economy and society to become climate-neutral by 2050. The law also sets the intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. However, on 6th February 2024, the European Commission presented its updated assessment for a 2040 climate target for the EU.

The Commission recommended reducing the EU's net greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2040, relative to 1990. This 2040 climate target will reaffirm the EU's determination to tackle climate change, and will shape the EU's path after 2030, to ensure the EU reaches climate neutrality by 2050. The climate neutrality objective is at the heart of the European Green Deal (Section 4.3.3. above), and is a legally binding objective set out in the European Climate Law.

Climate neutrality by 2050 means achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions for EU countries as a whole, mainly by cutting emissions, investing in green technologies and protecting the natural environment. The law aims to ensure that all EU policies contribute to this goal and that all sectors of the economy and society play their part.

The main objectives of the climate law include:

- 90% Reduction in Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Achieve a 90% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared to 1990 levels;
- Implementation of Existing Laws: Fully implement existing EU laws to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030;
- Decarbonisation of Industry: Focus on decarbonising industry by leveraging strengths in wind power, hydropower, and electrolysers, and investing in technologies for carbon capture, storage, and reuse;
- Boosting Domestic Manufacturing: Increase domestic manufacturing in growth sectors such as batteries, electric vehicles, heat pumps, and solar cells;
- Fairness and Solidarity: Ensure fairness and solidarity by supporting vulnerable citizens, regions, businesses, and workers through tools like the Social Climate Fund and Just Transition Fund;
- Open Dialogue: Maintain an open dialogue with all stakeholders, including farmers, businesses, social partners, and citizens.

4.3.8 RePower EU Plan

The RePower EU Plan was published on 18th May 2022 and is a plan which sets out a response to the hardships and global energy market disruption caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the need for the role of renewable energy to slow down climate change and to phase out Russian fossil fuels by 2027. To address these, the RePower EU Plan contains measures to:

- Save energy;
- Diversify supplies;

[7] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en

- Quickly substitute fossil fuels by accelerating Europe's clean energy transition;
- Smartly combine investments and reforms.

The RePower EU Plan states:

> *"Wind energy represents a significant future opportunity: resources are stable, abundant and public acceptance is higher. Europe is the global leader in offshore wind. To further strengthen the EU wind sector's global competitiveness and achieve the REPowerEU ambition with fast wind energy deployment, supply chains need to be strengthened and permitting drastically accelerated."*

The RePower EU Plan specifically requires that Member States should speed up the green transition and spur massive investment in renewable energy. We will need to enable industry and transport to substitute fossil fuels faster to bring down emissions and dependencies.

Project Response:
In response to European Union Directives and Policy, the increased target in the Renewable Energy Directive and change of wording to "over riding public interest" (European Commission (2021), underlines the vital nature of investments into new renewable energy developments such as the Proposed Development, which would increase the domestic renewable energy production capacity of Ireland and its contribution to the EU overall target.

As outlined in 'Council Regulation 2022/2577 as amended by Regulation Council Regulation (EU) 2024/223)', the temporary measures for speeding up the permitting of renewable energy projects (including the rebuttable presumption in favour that renewable energy projects are of overriding public interest and serve public health and safety for the purposes of specific derogations) have been extended to June 2025 by Regulation 2024/223.

Ireland's renewable energy share, and that of all EU member states, is calculated and monitored by the European Commission under different iterations of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), with Ireland continuing to work towards achieving renewable electricity targets. The latest data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) from September 2024 shows Ireland's total installed wind capacity at the end of 2023 was 4.74 GW, an increase of c. 0.20 GW in capacity during 2023. (Source: SEAI, September 2024). Regarding Irelands commitments to increasing the indigenous supply of renewable energy to reach our stated targets, the report goes on to say:

> *"In its most recent climate action plan (CAP), Ireland has set itself a target of 6 GW of installed wind capacity by the end of 2025. To achieve this target, Ireland will need to add an average of 0.63 GW of installed capacity in both 2024 and 2025. Ireland's target for 2030 is 15 GW of installed wind capacity, with 9 GW of onshore wind and 5GW of offshore wind. Achieving this target will require adding an average of 1.47 GW of installed capacity every year for the next seven years."*

4.4 National Policies and Legislation

National energy and climate policy is derived from the overarching European Policy which aims to unify the European Union in energy and climate goals. The following section sets out the relevant national policies which will influence the development of the country in the coming decades with respect to energy production, carbon neutrality and climate change mitigation.

These policies are supported by the latest Programme for Government (2020) 'Our Shared Future' which presents strong climate governance in rapidly reducing climate change in order to protect and improve public health and quality of life. The government are committed to rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector with an aim of providing the necessary actions to deliver national renewable electricity targets. These government ambitions support the ongoing generation of renewable energy from onshore wind sources, as detailed in the following section.

4.4.1 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act was signed into law in December 2015 by the then Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Alan Kelly. The Act sets out the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period up to and including the year 2050. The Act provides for a solid statutory foundation to the institutional arrangements necessary to enable the State to pursue and achieve the "national transition objective".

While there are no explicit targets set out within the Act itself, the legislation obliges the State to take into account any existing obligations of the State under the law of the European Union or any international agreement. In effect, the Act formally obliges the State to adhere to EU targets. The other major feature of the Act is the establishment of an expert advisory council which will advise and make recommendations to the Minister for the Environment. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act has paved the way for national policy support for renewable energy generation and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as set out in the following sections.

4.4.2 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, signed into law 23rd July 2021, is an Act to provide for the approval of plans by the Government in relation to climate change for the purpose of pursuing the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and carbon neutral economy by the end of the year 2050. It will establish a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law, and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure we achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term. The Act amends the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to significantly strengthen the framework for governance of climate action by the State in order to realise our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations.

The Act embeds the process of carbon budgeting into law, with the Government required to adopt a series of economy-wide five-yearly carbon budgets to include sectoral targets for each relevant sector on a rolling 15-year basis. These five-yearly carbon budgets commence in 2021, with provisions already in place for the first two, with the five-yearly carbon budgets equating to a total reduction of 51% emissions over the period to 2030. This reduction in emissions is in line with the programme for Government which commits to a 7% average yearly reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This Act will drive implementation of a suite of policies to help us achieve this goal.

The Act also requires for all Local Authorities to prepare individual Climate Action Plans which will include both mitigation and adaptation measures, representing a mandate for Local Authorities to adapt to climate change.

4.4.3 Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) and Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25)

The Government published an updated Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) on 20th December 2023. This third updated action plan follows on from the inaugural plan of 2019 which was a result of the Irish Government declaring a climate and biodiversity emergency on 9th May 2019. As of April 2025, Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) has been published, with the government's website stipulating that CAP25 is to be read in conjunction with CAP24.

The CAP provides a framework for delivering the Government's target of a 51% reduction (relative to 2018) in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030. CAP24 follows the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act* 2021, which commits Ireland to a legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions no later than 2050, and a reduction of 51% by 2030. The Act provides a governance framework for annual revisions of the Climate Action Plan and the development of a National Long-Term Climate Action Strategy at least once every ten years. As part of this plan, the Government is also committed to reducing emissions by an average 7% per annum by 2030. The CAP24 is underpinned by a series of sectoral emissions reduction ambitions and enabling actions.

CAP24 sets out an objective to more than double Ireland's onshore wind energy capacity to 9 GW by 2030 in order to meet new renewable energy targets and reduce emissions.

Key actions of relevance to the Project include:

- *The electricity system must achieve a 75% reduction in CO2, reaching 3MtCO2eq in the final year of 2026 - 2030 carbon budget period.*
- *Deliver up to 9 GW onshore wind (with 6GW by 2025) by 2030.*
- *Complete a revised version of Shaping our Electricity Future to define required new grid construction and reinforcements to achieve sectoral ceilings and carbon budgets.*
- *As an urgent priority, establish the investment framework and competitive market, arrangements needed to deliver zero carbon system services.*
- *Align the relevant constituent elements of the planning and permitting system to support accelerated renewable energy development and ensure renewables will be considered to be in the overriding public interest.*
- *Action EL/23/1: Establish a taskforce to accelerate renewables.*
- *Action EL/23/2: Publish the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework*
- *Action EL/23/3: Publish a roadmap for the development and implementation of Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies*
- *Action EL/23/4: Prepare new draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines for onshore renewables.*
- *Action EL/23/5: Complete analysis to update Shaping Our Electricity Future to accommodate 80% renewables and align with carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings for electricity.*
- *Action EL/23/6: Ensure electricity generation grid connection policies and regular rounds of connection offers which facilitate timely connecting of renewables, provides a locational signal and supports flexible technologies.*
- *Action EL/23/7: Publish an annual report setting out identifiable public benefits delivered by renewable energy sector including employment and skills/ training metrics, local investment and community benefits.*
- *Action EL/23/10: Deliver onshore and offshore RESS auctions as per the annual RESS auction calendar.*

- *Action EL/23/21: Carry out further studies to identify the investments and upgrades needed to facilitate 80% renewable electricity annual share.*

CAP25 reiterates many of these objectives outlined in CAP24, including the need to double Ireland's onshore wind energy capacity to 9 GW by 2030 in order to meet new renewable energy targets and reduce emissions. The CAP25 comprises a number of new, strategic actions however much of the detail behind the actions is still contained within CAP24. The key CAP25 actions of relevance to this project include:

- It establishes a target for Carbon Budget 1 (2021-2025) of 40 MtCO2eq, requiring a 75% across all sectors. Current EPA projections indicating an overshoot of over 1 MtCO2eq.
- It establishes a target for Carbon Budget 2 (2026-2030): 20 MtCO2eq requiring a 75% across all sectors. Current EPA projections indicating an overshoot of over 5MtCO2eq.
- Align, as relevant, with the Accelerating Renewable Electricity Taskforce Implementation Plan which sets out a roadmap for the actions to be taken in the near-term to help meet our 2030 targets.
- Action EL/25/1: Manage the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme
- Action El/25/2: Publish a long Duration Energy Storage Procurement recommendations paper
- Action EL/25/3: Development a data sharing framework regarding Low Carbon Technologies connection to the electricity grid
- Action EL/25/4: Develop Smart-flex standards roadmap
- Action EL/25/5: Develop consumer-led flexible demand processes

The Proposed Development will form an integral part of completing many of these actions set out in the CAP.

4.4.4 Eirgrid Assessment of Progress with Carbon Budget Compliance

Emissions analysis completed by Eirgrid[8] in support of our 2023 Climate Action Plan indicates that in a best case / optimistic case scenario Ireland will have utilised 59.8 Mt of our 60 Mt CO_2 equivalent emissions budget by the end of 2029, leaving a budget of only 0.2 Mt for 2030. However, in their central case scenario they are predicting that Ireland is currently on track to substantially overshoot this emissions target with emissions across the decade projected to reach 79.5 Mt. This would represent a 32.5% exceedance of our legally binding limits. This central case assessment is underpinned by assumptions in relation to the installed capacity of renewables set out in Table 4-2, below.

Table 4-2: EirGrid central case installed capacity assumptions resulting in a 32.5% exceedance of our sectoral emissions ceilings

Plant	Unit	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Onshore Wind	MW	4717	5046	5531	5800	6100	6400	6700	7000	7000
Solar PV	MW	462	1121	1870	2569	3155	3741	4327	4914	5500

[8] https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/245172/2c2fd729-261b-4b64-af5e-c7f5f8d18924.pdf#page=null

Plant	Unit	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Offshore Wind	MW	25	25	25	25	25	25	725	2865	5000

It is also worth noting that:

- This scenario is one which sees Ireland falling short on its 9000MW installed capacity target for onshore wind and is non-compliant with our carbon budget and sectoral emissions ceilings.
- Data for RESS 4 is pending following the most recent auction, therefore, the latest RESS data is from RESS 3 (Sept 2023), which showed Ireland has yet to reach the onshore wind installed capacity specified in this non-compliant scenario for 2022,as the Final Auction results from RESS 3 indicate Onshore Wind energy was successful in 148.4MW.
- The volumes clearing the RESS 3 auction fell well short of the volumes originally targeted for this auction and would not appear to be sufficient to align with even this non-compliant scenario – in other words, developments since that Eirgrid analysis was conducted are supportive of a conclusion that even the non-compliant central case scenario is out of reach.

4.4.5 EU Governance Regulation and Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP)

Under the EU Governance Regulation, Member States had to submit their 2021-2030 draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP's) by the end of 2018 and final plans by the end of 2019. The Commission has assessed these both at EU and Member State level. Member States will also need to update their NECPs by the end of June 2023 in a draft form and by 30 June 2024 in a final form in order to reflect an increased ambition. Member States are required to report on the progress made in implementing their energy and climate policies, including their NECPs, for the first time in March 2023 and every two years thereafter. The Governance Regulation is effectively the piece of EU legislation under which Ireland is held accountable in meeting its decarbonisation targets.

It is important to note that Article 4 of the Regulation sets out specific trajectory requirements for renewable energy share in key intermediate years of 2022, 2025 and 2027. The final version of Ireland's first NECP set out specific annual targets for delivery of onshore and offshore wind in order to meet the requirements of Article 4. These intermediate targets will be particularly difficult to deliver and will require early deployment of onshore wind in particular, as the legislative framework underpinning offshore wind is still under development. The minimum target for onshore wind in Ireland by 2025 is a total installed capacity of 5,900 MW, an increase of approximately 1,567 MW between 2021 and 2025[9]. This would need to increase substantially if there is any delay in the delivery of offshore wind in this timeframe. Given the timelines for grid offer processing, financing and construction, which can only commence after a successful grant of planning permission, the delivery of this 2025 intermediate target will depend entirely on the scale of projects consented in the next 1-2 years.

[9] 4,333 MW Installed Capacity in the Republic of Ireland as of May 2022 (Wind Energy Ireland) https://windenergyireland.com/about-wind/the-basics/facts-stats

4.4.6 Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework

As a strategic development framework, Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework, demonstrates an approach that joins up ambition for improvement across the different areas of Irish life, bringing the various government departments, agencies, State-owned enterprises and local authorities together behind a shared set of strategic objectives for rural, regional and urban development.

> *"The National Planning Framework is a planning framework to guide development and investment over the coming years. It does not provide every detail for every part of the country; rather it empowers each region to lead in the planning and development of their communities, containing a set of national objectives and key principles from which more detailed and refined plans will follow."*

The Framework sets out the key goals and objectives for the State, and central to this framework is the theme of Realising Our Sustainable Future. In particular, Section 9.2 of the Framework titled 'Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Low Carbon Economy' states the following:

"Our transition to a low carbon energy future requires:

- *A shift from predominantly fossil fuels to predominantly renewable energy sources;*
- *Increasing efficiency and upgrades to appliances, buildings and systems;*
- *Decisions around development and deployment of new technologies relating to areas such as wind, smart grids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy; and*
- *Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a low carbon economy."*

The NPF is supported by a series of National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) which the Framework seeks to deliver. The purpose of NSOs is to create a single vision, through a shared set of goals for every community across the country. The most pertinent outcomes in the context of the Proposed Development are as shown in Table 4-2:

Table 4-3: Proposed Renewable Energy Development

Policy Objective	Description
National Strategic Outcome 1: Compact Growth	• Encourage and attract entrepreneurship and innovation in the context of the rural economy and its continuing sustainable diversification, particularly where low carbon outputs can be achieved;
National Strategic Outcome 8: Transition to Sustainable Energy	• Deliver 40% of our electricity needs from renewable sources by 2020 with a strategic aim to increase renewable deployment in line with EU targets and national policy objectives out to 2030 and beyond. It is expected that this increase in renewable deployment will lead to a greater diversity of renewable technologies in the mix. • Reinforce the distribution and transmission network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of a more renewables focused source of energy across the major demand centres.

A series of National Policy Objectives (NPOs) were developed to set the context for regional and local planning policy in Ireland. In the context of the Proposed Development, the following NPOs given in Table 4-3 are considered the most relevant:

Table 4-4: National Policy Objectives (NPOs) from Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework

Policy Objective	Description
National Policy Objective 15	Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid overdevelopment, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
National Policy Objective 21	Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services, including ICT based industries and those addressing climate change and sustainability.
National Policy Objective 23	Facilitate the development of the rural economy through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.
National Policy Objective 52	The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the requirements of all relevant environmental legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.
National Policy Objective 54	Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.
National Policy Objective 55	Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050.

Section 1.2: '*Making the Vision a Reality*', recognises the need for new energy systems and transmission grids in order to deliver a more distributed, renewable focused national energy system in order to harness the potential from wind, wave and solar energy sources.

> *"The National Climate Policy Position establishes the national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.*
>
> *This objective will shape investment choices over the coming decades in line with the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework. New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables-focused energy generation system, harnessing both the considerable onshore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand."*

With regard to planning and investment for rural locations, Section 5.4: Planning and Investment to Support Rural Job Creation, recognises the key role of energy production in assisting in the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages to create and sustain vibrant rural communities.

"Rural areas have significantly contributed to the energy needs of the country and will continue to do so, having a strong role to play in securing a sustainable renewable energy supply. In planning Ireland's future energy landscape and in transitioning to a low carbon economy, the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies is essential. Innovative and novel renewable energy solutions have been delivered in rural areas over the last number of years, particularly from solar, wind and biomass energy sources."

4.4.7 Revised National Planning Framework (2025)

The Revised National Planning Framework (RNPF) has now been formally approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas (8th April), with the Revised NPF 2025 document being published on 30th April 2025.

The revised framework acknowledges that Ireland needs to make up for lost ground in relation to carbon reduction targets and move towards the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and places a stronger emphasis on 'carbon neutrality' through the new and revised policies and objectives.

There is increased emphasis on the importance of renewable energy schemes in the RNPF and the infrastructure needed to support this, with new sections of the framework specifically focusing on 'Renewable Electricity'. Chapter 9 of the RNPF acknowledges that the "accelerated delivery of additional renewable energy generation is…essential for Ireland to meet its climate targets." A number of new and amended National Policy Objectives (NPOs) have been included to align with RED III, REPowerEU Plan, Ireland's Climate Action Plan (2024 & 2025) – NPO 70, NPO 71 & NPO 72, with NPO 73 supporting co-location of renewable technologies with other supporting technologies and complementary land uses.

The NPF (2018) provided broad support for renewables, however it lacked specific renewable energy targets. NPO 74 & NPO 75 now sets 'Regional Renewable Energy Capacity Allocations' for Onshore Wind and Solar. These targets require each region to strategically plan for sufficient wind and solar energy developments in order to achieve the overall national target of 9GW onshore wind by 2030. Crucially, for the Proposed Development located in the Eastern and Midlands region, that Power Capacity Allocation is 1,966 MW. This compares to an energised capacity for the region of only 284 MW in 2023 - a considerable shortfall.

The Proposed Development will provide 52.8 MW of capacity for the region, helping to bridge the gap set out in the RNPF.

4.4.8 Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2021 - 2030

The National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NDP) published in October 2021, in tandem with the National Planning Framework (NPF), sets out the Government's over-arching investment strategy and budget for the period 2021-2030.

The plan aims to balance the demand for public investment across all sectors with focus on improving the delivery of infrastructure projects. The NDP provides a platform from which investment can be provided and strategized in terms of economic growth, development and sustainability needs.

The key role of the NDP is to set out the updated configuration for public capital investment over the next 10 years in order to achieve the National Strategic Outcomes as set out within the NPF. The NDP outlines a number of key energy initiatives, which set out to diversify our energy resources, and to assist in the transition towards a decarbonised society.

The NDP emphasises National Strategic Outcome 8: Transition to a Climate-Neutral and Climate Resilient Society, noting that:

"The Government will continue to support the deployment of additional electricity generation through the auction-based Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)"

In achieving a climate-neutral and climate resilient society, the NDP outlines strategic investment priorities which relate to the aims of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme. It is stated that the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) auctions will deliver competitive levels of onshore wind electricity generation which indicatively could be up to 8 GW of onshore wind by 2030. The NDP also outlines that the RESS will also support the delivery of up to 5 GW of additional offshore renewable electricity generation by 2030.

It is considered that such schemes, in conjunction with greater investment in renewable energy, diversity of supply, and increased utilisation and adoption of electricity storage, will significantly assist in promoting a low carbon/less energy intensive supply. The investments outlined within the NDP review will make a critical contribution to the achievement of a low carbon and resilient electricity system. The Proposed Development will contribute to the aims of the NDP in providing renewable electricity generation to the national grid.

4.4.9 Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections, 2018 - 2040

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are responsible for developing annual national emission projections for greenhouse gases for all key sectors of the economy, including transport.

The EPA's publication entitled Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections (2022)10 provides an updated assessment of Ireland's projected greenhouse gas emissions out to 2040 which includes an assessment of progress towards achieving its emission reduction targets to 2030 set down under the EU Effort Sharing Decision (Decision No 406/2009/EC). Ireland's 2020 target was to achieve a 20% reduction of non-Emission Trading Scheme (non-ETS) sector emissions (i.e. agriculture, transport, the built environment, waste and non-energy intensive industry) on 2005 levels with annual binding limits set for each year beyond 2020. 2030 targets for EU Member States were adopted by the European Council in 2018. Irelands 2030 target under the Effort Sharing Regulation is a 30% reduction of emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030. There will be binding annual limits over the 2021-2030 period to meet that target.

During its operation, the estimated 161,885 MWh (megawatt hours) of electricity per year produced by the Proposed Wind Farm would be sufficient to supply approximately 38,500 Irish households, based on the average Irish household using 4.2 MWh of electricity (this figure is available from the March 2017 CER Review of Typical Consumption Figures Decision). Thus, this energy will be used to offset the same amount of energy that would otherwise be generated from burning of fossil fuels at power stations.

It is estimated that approximately 37,217 tonnes of CO2 emissions per annum will be offset due to the Proposed Development. As a result, the operational stage of the Proposed Development will have a significant long term positive impact on air quality and climate change, in line with policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level.

Further details relating to the positive effects of the proposal on air quality and climate change are included in Chapter 6 of this EIAR.

[10] EPA-Ireland's-GHG-Projections-Report-2021-2040v4.pdf

4.4.10 National Policy Conclusion

The development of the Proposed Wind Farm and Proposed Substation is in support of national policy as set out above. The project supports the enhancement of the competitiveness of rural areas and facilitates the development and diversification of the rural economy by supporting the energy sector and increasing the share of renewables in Ireland's energy mix.

The Proposed Development contributes to the nation's target increase of renewable electricity from 30% to 80% by 2030 and supports the target 9 GW of onshore wind energy in Ireland by 2030 as set out in the Climate Action Plan.

The project supports national targets of climate change mitigation and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions where significant focus has been set out in the recent Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. The ambitious new programme for government is prioritising carbon neutrality and renewable energy generation. In light of this, it is important for the nation to rely on proven technologies such as onshore wind in order to meet the near-term objectives, as well as long-term objectives.

The proposed project promotes the generation of renewable energy at appropriate locations and supports the achievement of a low carbon economy by 2050. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is in line with national policy and supports the achievement of national energy and sustainability targets.

4.5 Regional Policies

4.5.1 The Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

The Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) was published in June 2019 to support the implementation of the NPF and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the region.

The RSES remarks:

> *"The Region will need to shift from its reliance on using fossil fuels and natural gas as its main energy source to a more diverse range of low and zero-carbon sources, including renewable energy".*

The RSES states that "*Onshore wind, bioenergy, solar and offshore energy"* will be required to decarbonise the energy sector for the region. The strategy notes that:

> *"New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewable energy focused system, harnessing both the considerable on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar".*

The strategy also states that decentralisation of energy will be critical for the region to become more self-sufficient in relation to its energy needs and that this will involve a shift from conventional energy supply systems to a more diverse range of low and zero-carbon sources including renewable energy.

A number of chapters within the RSES give specific regional policy objectives (RPOs) which support the development of renewable energy infrastructure such as the Proposed Development. The following policy objectives are set out within the RSES which are in support of the development of renewable energy projects in the region.

Table 4-5: Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

Policy Objective	Description
RPO 4.84	**Rural Areas** Support the rural economy and initiatives in relation to diversification, agri-business, rural tourism and renewable energy so as to sustain the employment opportunities in rural areas. In keeping with the NPF, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) will support the longer term strategic planning for industrial peatland areas. This may include support, where appropriate, for a Transition Team in place and preparation of a comprehensive after-use framework plan for the peatlands and related infrastructure, which addresses environmental, economic and social issues, including employment and replacement enterprise reflecting the current transition from employment based around peat extraction.
RPO 6.9 (bullet point 4)	**Regional Enterprise Plans** Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy.
RPO 7.35	**Decarbonizing the Energy Sector** EMRA shall, in conjunction with local authorities in the Region, identify Strategic Energy Zones as areas suitable for larger energy generating projects, the role of community and micro energy production in urban and rural settings and the potential for renewable energy within industrial areas. The Strategic Energy Zones for the Region will ensure all environmental constraints are addressed in the analysis. A regional landscape strategy could be developed to support delivery of projects within the Strategic Energy Zones.
RPO 10.20	**Energy Infrastructure** Support and facilitate the development of enhanced electricity and gas supplies, and associated networks, to serve the existing and future needs of the Region and facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects that might be brought forward in the lifetime of this Strategy. This Includes the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to facilitate linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity and gas transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process.
RPO 10.22 (bullet point 4)	**Energy Infrastructure** Facilitate the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to allow linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner.

The Proposed Development will aid in meeting the objectives set out in the RSES including diversification of the rural economy, actions against climate change and the sustainable development of wind energy at an appropriate location.

4.6 Local Policy

4.6.1 Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

It is a specific planning policy requirement under Section 28 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) that in making Development Plans a planning authority has regard to national policy on renewable energy as contained in the aforementioned policy documents. A County Development Plan is required to indicate how the implementation of the Development Plan will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation. This applies in particular to wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource.

The Kildare County Development Plan (CDP) 2023-2029 sets out the strategic framework for land use planning in the county.

Chapter 7 of the CDP sets out the energy and communications aim for the County:

> *"To encourage and support energy and communications efficiency and to achieve a reasonable balance between responding to EU and National Policies on climate change, renewable energy and communications and enabling resources to be harnessed in a manner consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county"*

The most pertinent transposed policies and objectives are outlined in Table 4-5:

Table 4-6: Extracts from the Kildare County Council Development Plan (2023-2029)

Policy / Objective	Description
Objective REP12	Ensure that economic and enterprise related development is provided in a manner which facilitates a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and accelerates the transition towards a sustainable, low carbon and circular economy. The following measures shall be supported: • An increase in employment densities within walkable distances of communities and on public transport routes. • Promotion of walking and cycling and use of public transport through increased permeability and mobility management 116measures within and outside employment areas • The sourcing of power from district heating and renewables including wind and solar. Additional native tree planting and landscaping on existing and proposed enterprise zones and development sites to aid with carbon sequestration, contributing to the green infrastructure network of the County and promoting quality placemaking
Objective ECA1	Prepare, within 1 year of the adoption of the County Development Plan a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for County Kildare to provide a baseline analysis for Kildare and for the inclusion of measurable targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation.

Policy / Objective	Description
Objective EC011	Encourage wind energy developments in suitable locations in an environmentally sustainable manner whilst having regard to Government policy and the County Wind Energy Strategy, while being sensitive to the EU and national target of 30% of land for biodiversity. Subject to AA screening and where applicable, Stage 2 AA so as to ensure and protect the favourable status of European sites and their hydrological connections. Such developments will have regard for protected species and provide mitigation and monitoring where applicable
Objective EC065	Support the target in the Climate Action Plan 2021 for a doubling of existing on-shore wind energy from circa 4GW (today) to 8GW by 2030

It is important to note that Chapter 7, section 7.5 of the CDP refers to the 53.5 MW of "permitted wind farm developments". 48 MW of this share is accounted for by Drehid Wind Farm. It is clear that The Proposed Development, considered "permitted" in the CDP, forms the majority of the county's existing permitted wind development. This section of the CDP may have been drafted at a time when a previous iteration of the Proposed Development had been consented, therefore considering it "permitted" in the context of the CDP. However, the decision to give consent for the development was appealed by a third party to the High Court, and North Kildare Wind Farm limited subsequently decided to concede due to issues regarding the plans and particulars of the Proposed Development, following the 'Derryadd decision'. That is, the Applicant understood that more specific detail should be presented within the planning application regarding, for example, turbine tip height.

It is important to note that the Proposed Development had been permitted by An Bord Pleanála, and that the Applicant decided to concede in the High Court solely on the grounds of the Derryadd decision, as the Applicant believes that the application was otherwise fully appropriate. The current application for the Proposed Wind Farm presents specific turbine dimensions.

Furthermore, the turbine layout of the Proposed Wind Farm has been reduced from a 12-turbine layout to an 11-turbine layout; and crossings of the Fear English River have been reduced from 5 crossing points to 3 crossing points. As such, the current layout will have reduced potential impacts on the environment.

There is also the concurrent application for the Proposed Substation which will enable the Proposed Wind Farm to connect to the 110 kV Kinnegad-Rinawade overhead line, negating the requirements in the previous application for trenching a cable route into the local road network. The current proposal will require a length of collector circuit cable to be trenched into the L50242, however this road is subject to much lower traffic volumes. As such, any concerns raised previously regarding potential impacts on the road network, arising from the trenching of the cable route, are significantly reduced.

In summary, it is evident that the current applications for the Proposed Development are broadly in line with the previously consented development; but now include the specific details required following the Derryadd decision, and the design has been refined to reduce the potential impacts on the environment and local road network.

The CDP calculates that the county should have 280 MW of installed wind energy by 2030 but states that a more realistic 2030 target at this stage is 107 MW. The CDP states that there is currently 53.5 MW of permitted wind energy development within the county. However, The Proposed Development is used to calculate this figure. Without the Drehid Wind Farm, the permitted wind development within the CDP should be quoted as 5.5 MW. It is clear that the County has a long way to go to make up the target of 107 MW and that The Proposed Development is critical in attempting to meet this target.

4.6.2 Kildare Wind Energy Strategy 2017-2023

The Wind Energy Strategy forms an appendix of the current Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029.

The Wind Energy Strategy recognises how important of a resource wind energy is to Ireland, having one of the most advantageous wind regimes in Europe. The report describes how we are at a "cross-roads" in terms of planning the development of our future energy markets. It is acknowledged that relying on the old ways of imported fossil fuels creates problems associated with climate change as well as volatile fuel markets. Wind Energy, on the other hand, would offer a low-carbon, indigenous energy supply which would allow us to have better control over the pricing of energy in the country. Such an indigenous supply would be insulated from the volatile pricing associated with fossil fuels which fluctuates according to geopolitical events, global health scares such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and global supply-and-demand trends.

The Wind Energy Strategy takes a stepwise approach to assigning "strategy zones" across the county of Kildare. The strategy zones are:

- Zone 1 – acceptable in principle
- Zone 2 – open to consideration
- Zone 3 – not normally permissible

The steps taken in the report in order to identify these zones are as follows:

Table 4-7: Stepwise process to identifying strategy zones for wind energy development

Policy / Objective	Description
Step 1	Assess the county for areas with wind potential ranging from an "extensive" wind resource to lesser wind resources. This was completed by making use of the SEAI's Wind Atlas for Ireland.
Step 2	Produce a landscape sensitivity analysis of the landscape to assess the sensitivity to wind energy developments. Sensitivity is assessed across factors of cultural heritage, scenic quality, rarity, uniqueness, natural heritage, and environmental factors.
Step 3	Combine the information collected from Step 1 and Step 2 into a layered map. Add layers to the map regarding the built and natural environment, archaeological and amenity designations in the Development Plan and existing settlements.
Step 4	Assess the suitability of the area for connecting to the national grid.

Following this procedure, a map is produced as illustrated in Figure 4-2. According to this map. the Proposed Development is located in an area considered '*Open to Consideration'* for wind energy development.

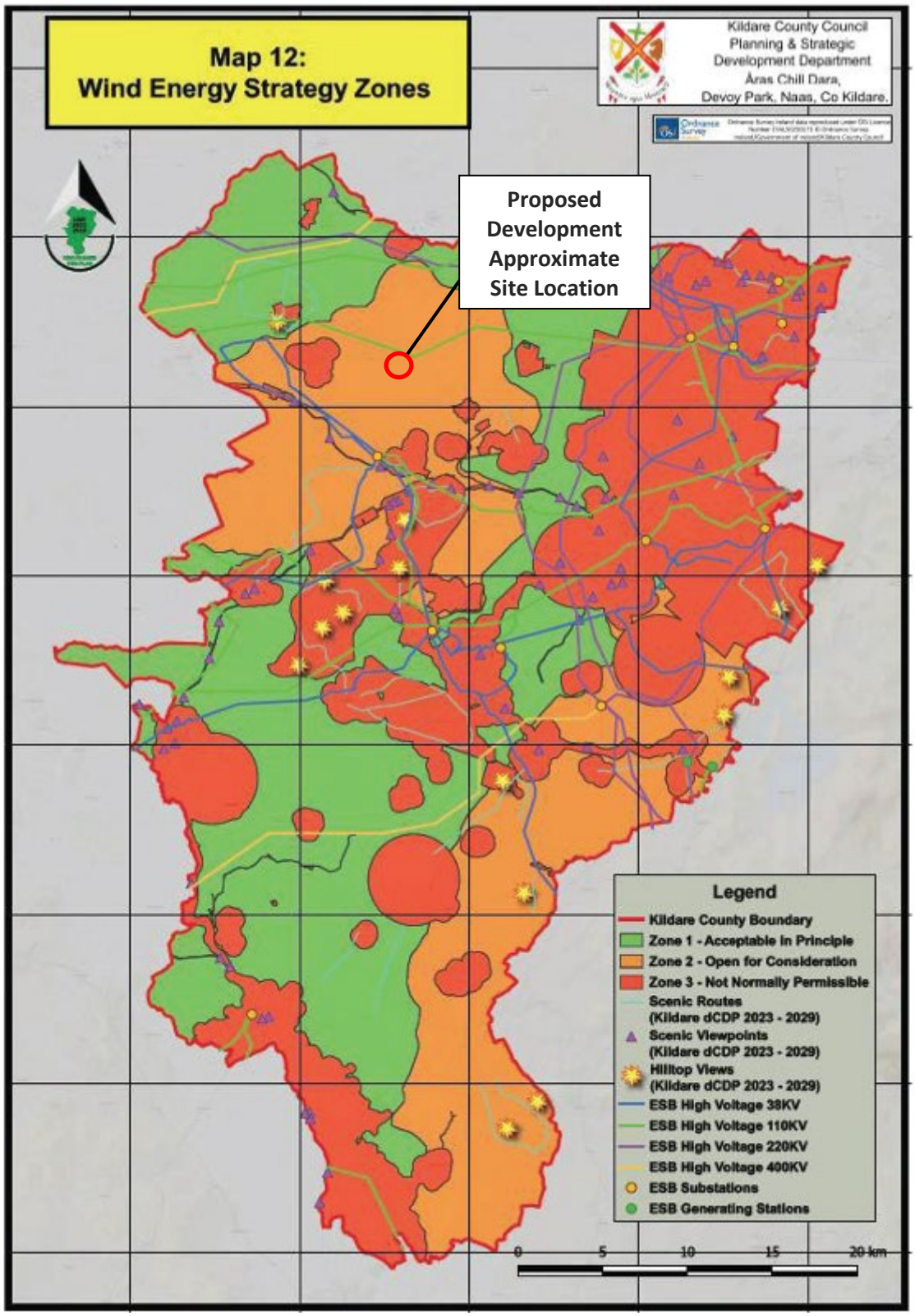

Figure 4-2: Map 12 of Appendix 2, Wind Energy Strategy, Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029

4.7 Other Relevant Policies and Guidelines

4.7.1 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government – Wind Energy Development – Planning Guidelines 2006

The Wind Energy Development Planning Guidelines (2006) published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) offer advice to planning authorities assessing planning applications for wind farm developments. The guidelines set out criteria which assist in the identification of suitable locations for wind energy development. They are also of assistance to developers and the wider public in considering wind energy development.

The Proposed Development has considered the provisions of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 in the design and siting of both the Proposed Wind Farm and The Proposed Substation. The Proposed Development is considered to be in line with the recommendations as set out in the Guidelines.

4.7.2 Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines (December 2019)

The Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines were published in December 2019 for public consultation. The guidelines will supersede the 2006 guidelines once formally adopted by the government. The revised guidelines aim to apply consistency across all Renewable Energy Strategies with regard to Development Management objectives. It is understood however that the Draft Guidelines are currently under review.

4.7.3 Irish Wind Energy Association – Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry

The '*Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry*' was published by the Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) (now called Wind Energy Ireland (WEI)) in 2008, with the Guidelines updated in 2012. These guidelines are to encourage responsible and sensitive wind farm development, and to provide assistance and recommendations for those developing onshore wind energy projects in Ireland.

The approach to the development of The Proposed Wind Farm is in line with the 2012 IWEA guidelines in that it is in accordance with relevant planning and environmental legislation, requirements for environmental impact assessment, provides an environmentally sensitive design, takes account of best practice health and safety and provides opportunities for quality public engagement in order to develop a responsible and sensitive wind energy project.

4.7.4 IWEA Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment 2013

The 'Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment' was published by IWEA (now called Wind Energy Ireland (WEI)) in 2013. WEI and its members support the provision of financial contributions by wind farm operators to local communities and have sought to formulate best practice principles for the provision of a community commitment. The document sets out WEI's best practice principles for delivering extended benefits to local communities for wind farm developments of 5MW or above.

Best practice principles of community engagement when planning the engagement strategy and preparing associated literature are also outlined in the document. The aim of the publication is to ensure that the view of local communities is taken on board at all stages of development and that local communities share in the benefits of the development. Throughout the consultation process for the proposed development, specific regard has been taken of this guidance document. Details of the public and stakeholder consultation process carried out throughout the development of the project is detailed in Chapter 5 – EIA Scoping, Consultation and Key Issues.

4.7.5 Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland – Guidelines for Community Engagement

In December 2016, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) issued a code of practice for wind energy development in relation to community engagement.

This Code of Good Practice states it:

> *"[It] is intended to ensure that wind energy development in Ireland is undertaken in observance with the best industry practices, and with the full engagement of communities around the country."*

The guidance states that the methods of engagement should reflect the nature of the project and the potential level of impact that it could have on a community. Throughout the consultation process the applicant has had regard to the Code of Practice for Wind Energy including the practical steps that wind farm promoters should comply with in engaging with communities as set out in this Guidance.

4.7.6 Commission for Regulation of Utilities: Grid Connection Policy

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) (previously the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER)) launched a new grid connection policy in March 2018 for renewable and other generators, known as ECP-1, which will seek to allow "shovel ready" projects that already have a valid planning permission, connect to the electricity networks. The principal objective which guides this decision is to allow these shovel-ready projects to have an opportunity to connect to the network, along with laying the foundations for future, more regular batches for connection.

The first connection offers were issued in August 2018 with the 'Ruleset for Enduring Connection Policy Stage 2 (ECP-2)' published in 2020 stating the system operators are expected to hold further batches at the end of March 2021.

On the 10th of June 2020, the CRU published their decision on ECP-2, which set policy for at least three annual batches of connection offers (ECP 2.1, ECP-2.2, and ECP-2.3). Subsequently, the CRU published their decision on ECP-2.42 , which set policy for an additional batch of connection offers (ECP-2.4). The application windows are envisaged to be open for the month of September each year. The application window for ECP-2.4, closed on 30th November 2023. The System Operators (SOs) have used the ECP-2 decision paper, ECP-2 ruleset and the subsequent ECP-2.4 decision paper to determine which applicants have been initially successful in making the list of 62 projects due to receive connection offers under Category A.

The ECP system replaces the previous 'Gate' system of grid connection applications. With regard to the Proposed Development, the Applicant will seek a grid connection offer in accordance with the CRU policy following the successful granting of planning permission.

4.7.7 Onshore RESS Auctions Progress to Date

The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) is a critical component of Ireland's strategy to transition to a sustainable, low-carbon energy system. The fourth iteration, which has just concluded, of this scheme continues to build on the successes and lessons learned from the previous rounds, aiming to further enhance Ireland's renewable energy capacity and meet it climate targets.

As with the previous iterations of the RESS, RESS 4 is designed to support the development of renewable electricity projects through competitive auctions, which then determine which projects receive financial support, ensuring that the most cost-effective and efficient projects are selected. The RESS scheme is aligned with Ireland's Climate Action Plan and the EU's Clean Energy Package, which includes the Renewable Energy Directive and the National Energy and Climate Plan, all of which have been described above. A key aim of RESS 4 is to increase the share of renewable energy in Ireland's overall electricity mix, contributing to the national target of achieving 80% renewable electricity by 2030, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhance Ireland's energy security.

Eligible projects include onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, hydro along with many other renewable generation methods. The RESS scheme has a number of key policy objectives, which include the following:

- Cost Effectiveness: Ensure that renewable energy projects are developed at the lowest feasible cost to electricity consumers, leveraging competitive forces to drive down prices;
- Energy Security: Enhance Ireland's energy security by diversifying the energy supply and reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels;
- Technology Diversity: Broaden the renewable electricity technology mix to include a variety of sources such as onshore wind, offshore wind, and solar power;
- Community Participation: Increase community involvement and ownership in renewable energy projects, ensuring that local communities benefit from the transition to renewable energy;
- Sustainability: Promote long-term sustainability by supporting projects that contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the achievement of Ireland's climate targets;
- Economic Growth: Support the growth of the green economy, creating sustainable job opportunities and fostering innovation in the renewable energy sector;
- Consumer Protection: Shield consumers from high and volatile fossil fuel prices, ensuring long-term benefits and stable energy costs.

4.8 Conclusion

The policies, objectives and legislation as described throughout this chapter sets out significant international, European, national and local policy support for a move to renewable energy technologies and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is committed to meeting International and European targets and if these targets are not met the government must purchase Carbon Credits to meet compliance with both emissions and renewable energy targets or face fines from the EU.

The SEAI report, Energy in Ireland (2023)[11] sets out the nation's latest progress towards renewable energy targets. 2022 saw renewable energy production account for approximately 13.1% of the nation's overall energy production. The National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP) had set a target of 16% by the year 2020. It is evident that we still have not reached this target, now some time after the target year has passed.

While Ireland has come a long way in increasing renewable energy generation, the targets are ever increasing from a European perspective. 2050 European targets effectively mean that Europe's energy production will have to be almost carbon-free by 2050.

[11] https://www.seai.ie/sites/default/files/publications/Energy-in-Ireland-2023.pdf

In response to this, Ireland produced the Climate Action Plan 2025 in which this CAP sets out an objective to ramp up Ireland's onshore wind energy capacity to 9 GW by 2030, in order to meet new renewable energy targets and reduce emissions. Therefore, there is a clear national mandate to accommodate significant onshore wind within the next decade. Furthermore, the *National Planning Framework* places greater emphasis on a move to a low-carbon economy to reduce Ireland's carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets.

It is this commitment on energy and climate policy that justifies a clear need for renewable energy generation in Ireland. Onshore wind is recognised as being a key to achieving this as emphasised in the Climate Action Plan 2025. It is also a proven technology that will be critical to meeting the near-term renewable targets up to 2030.

The *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy* (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands Region supports the increased use of renewable energy sources to transition the Eastern and Midlands Region to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy and mitigate against climate change.

The RSES aims to leverage the Eastern and Midlands Region as a leader and innovator in sustainable renewable energy generation, supporting the development of a renewable energy project in an appropriate location, such as that of the proposed Drehid Wind Farm.

National and regional energy policies have been reinforced by the current Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029, with its appended Wind Energy Strategy report. The report recognises the importance of wind energy as a resource to Ireland, having one of the most advantageous wind regimes in Europe.

The report describes how we are at a "cross-roads" in terms of planning the development of our future energy markets. The Wind Energy Strategy report finds that the immediate site area of the Proposed Development is located within an area described as a 'open to consideration' for wind energy development. The CDP calculates that the county should have 280 MW of installed wind energy by 2030 but states that a more realistic 2030 target at this stage is 107 MW. The CDP states that there is currently 53.5 MW of permitted wind energy development within the county. However, The Proposed Development is used to calculate this figure. Without the Drehid Wind Farm, the permitted wind development within the CDP should be quoted as 5.5 MW. It is clear that the County has a long way to go to make up the target of 107 MW and that The Proposed Development is critical in attempting to meet this target.

In conclusion, the policy context for the site and surrounding area is considered favourable for the Proposed Development, both from a national policy perspective with regard to renewable energy provision, and at a local level with respect to designations and the ability for the site to accommodate the Proposed Development.

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