MWP

Planning Statement

Ballinla Wind Farm

Ballinla Wind Farm Limited

August 2025

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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared by MWP, on behalf of Ballinla Wind Farm Limited (the applicant), to accompany a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) planning application to develop a wind farm development comprising seven (7) wind turbines (the Proposed Development) in east County Offaly.

MWP commenced pre-application consultations with An Coimisiún Pleanála (ACP) in October 2023 and two pre-application meetings were held, the first on the 24th November 2023 and the second on the 6th of June 2024. On the 28th November 2024, the board concluded the pre-application process and issued its opinion that the Proposed Development would be Strategic Infrastructure and that an application for approval should be made to them under 37E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

This report provides a concise overview of the planning merits of the Proposed Development. The purpose of this planning report is to provide details which will assist ACP in determining whether the Proposed Development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, and accordingly whether planning permission should be granted for the Proposed Development. The report is set out as follows:

- Section 2: Application Site - This section provides a description of the site, its context, and the relevant planning history.
- Section 3: Description of Proposed Development - This section describes the proposal.
- Section 4: Planning Policy Context – This section outlines the national, regional and local planning policies relevant to the application site and Proposed Development.
- Section 5: Planning Assessment – This section provides an assessment of the principle of development and other relevant considerations.
- Section 6: Conclusion - This section summarises the key points set out in the report.

This Planning Report comprises part of a suite of application documents, which also includes an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). All documents should be read in conjunction in order to have a full understanding of the nature, location and extent of the Proposed Development.

This planning statement accompanies a planning application for a wind farm development submitted under the European Union (Planning and Development) (Renewable Energy) Regulations 2025 (S.I. 274 of 2025), which transposes key provisions of the Renewable Energy Directive III (Directive EU 2023/2413) into Irish planning law.

2. Application Site

2.1 The Site and Environs

The Proposed Development is located in a rural area of east Co. Offaly. The site is approximately 4km west of the Edenderry town boundary and 24km east of Tullamore. Figure 1 outlines the location of the Proposed Development and the red line boundary included in the planning application. The area within this red line boundary is 42 hectares (ha).

The Proposed Development for which consent is being sought comprises the construction of seven wind turbines, an onsite 110 kilovolt (kV) substation and all ancillary works in County Offaly (the Proposed Wind Farm), in addition to temporary works along the turbine delivery route (TDR) (the Proposed TDR). The accompanying EIAR and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) also considers the associated grid connection (the Proposed Grid Connection), which will be subject to a separate planning application.

The Proposed Wind Farm is within the townland of Leitrim in the municipal district of Edenderry, Co. Offaly. The Turbine Delivery Route (TDR) will include proposed developments at three separate TDR nodes in the townlands of Leitrim, Ballyfore Big, Ballyleakin, and Ballina (Geashill By) Co. Offaly. These three TDR nodes are red lined for Proposed Development in the application.

The Proposed Grid Connection, which is not included in this planning application, will be a linear development within the townlands of Leitrim, Lumville, Ballinla, Clarkeville, Ballyfore Big, Ballyfore Little, Ballyeakin and Ballykilleen, Co. Offaly. The future grid connection route is 8km along the public roads from the Proposed Wind Farm southeast to the existing Philipstown 110kV substation adjacent to the Edenderry Power Station.

Existing land cover at the site consists of agricultural land in the northern section and coniferous commercial forest in the southern section. The Proposed Wind Farm is traversed by the L5010 local road which travels in an east west direction bisecting the Proposed Wind Farm. The Grand Canal is located to the north of the Proposed Development. The surrounding land includes agricultural fields, forestry and cutover peatlands.

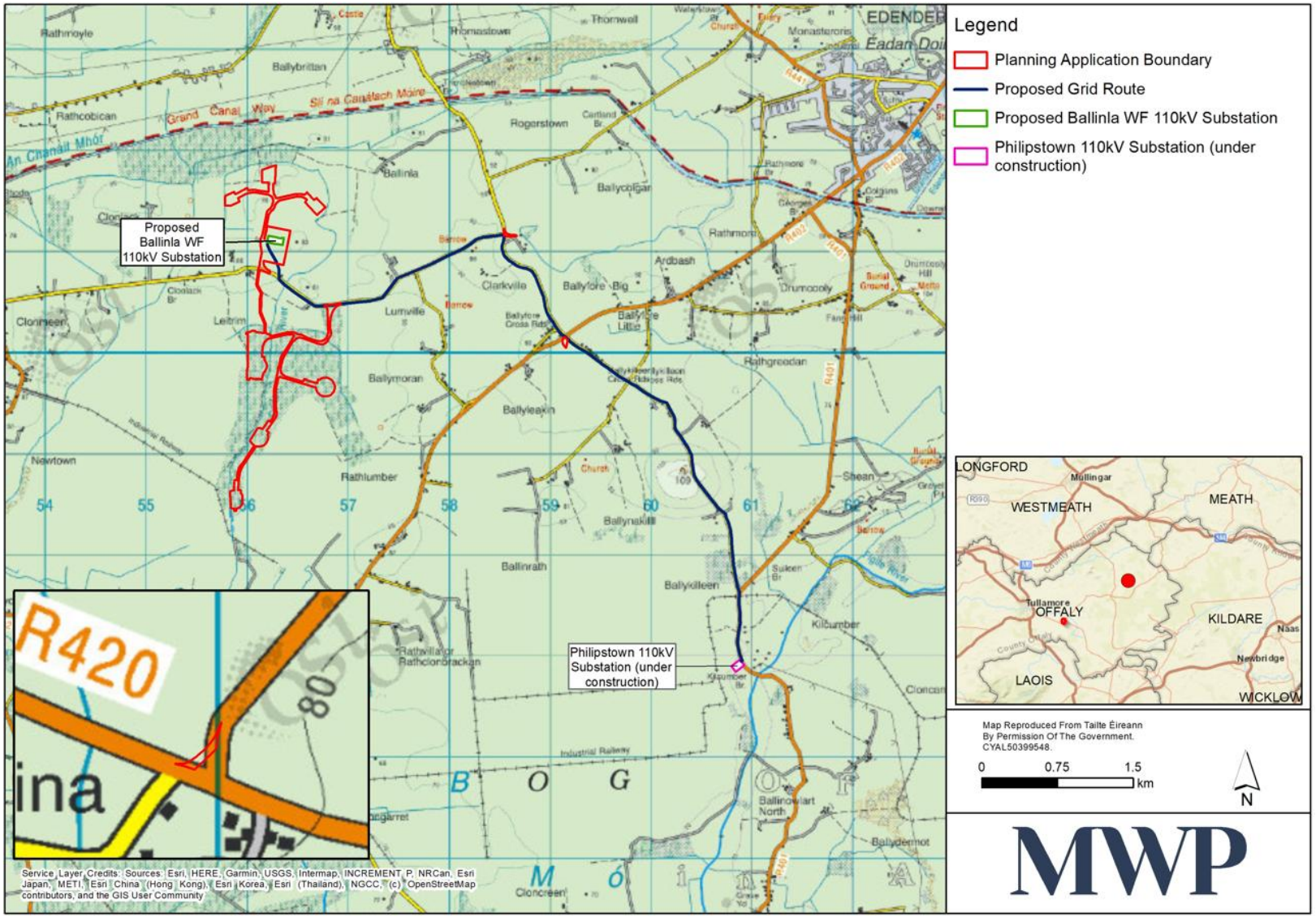

Figure 1 Site location and Red Line Boundary of the Proposed Development

2.2 Planning History

There are no previous planning applications within the Proposed Development site on the Offaly County Council Eplan Website.

2.3 Designation

The Offaly Wind Energy Strategy (WES) forms part of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. The WES aims to guide the development of wind energy developments in the county up to 2027.

The WES identifies the optimum locations for wind energy developments in the county having regard to environmental and geographical constraints and the protection of the amenities of local residents.

The WES designated areas are as follows:

- Areas unsuitable for new wind energy developments
- Areas open to consideration for new wind energy developments

The Proposed Development site is located within lands open to consideration to wind energy developments as shown in Figure 2.

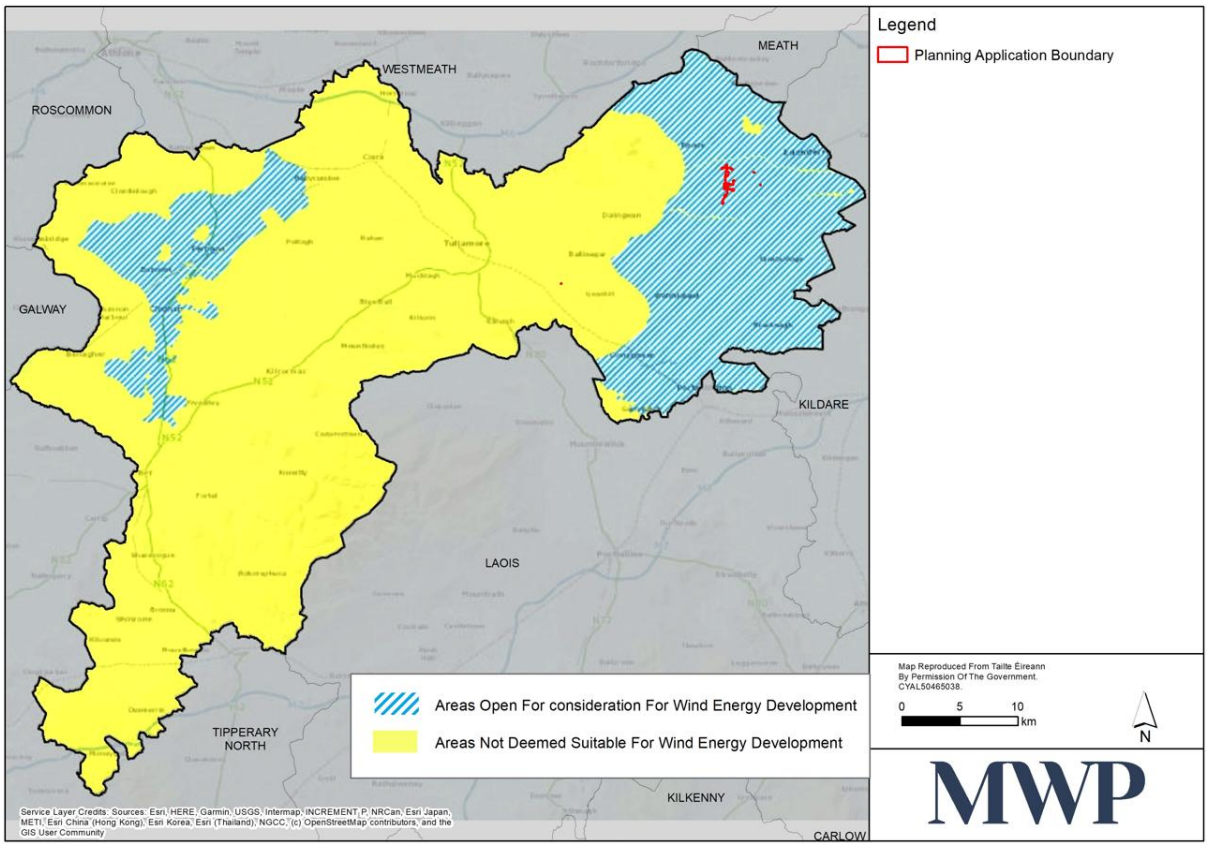

Figure 2- Location of Proposed Development within Areas Open for Consideration for Eind Energy Development as per the Offaly Wind Energy Strategy

Section 8 of the WES states that it is the policy of the Council to assess proposals for new wind energy developments in accordance with Map No. 10 'Wind Energy Strategy Designations', Climate Action Energy

Objective CAEO-05 (Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy). Within the WES areas open to consideration to wind energy developments are described as follows:

"These areas are open for consideration for wind energy development as these areas are characterised by low housing densities, do not conflict with European or National designated sites and have the ability by virtue of their landscape characteristics to absorb wind farm developments. Notwithstanding this designation, wind farm developments in these areas will be evaluated on a case by case basis subject to criteria listed in Development Management Standard 109 contained in Chapter 13 of Volume 1 of this County Development Plan and the Section 28 Wind Energy Development Guidelines."

3. Proposed Development

The Proposed Development to be assessed within this EIAR consist of the following elements:

- Seven Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs) (blade tip height 185m, refer to Table 2-1 for dimensions of each turbine).
- Seven WTG foundations and hardstand areas.
- One electrical substation (110kV) including independent power producer (IPP) substation and wind farm operations compound with associated ancillary buildings, security fencing and all associated works.
- One LiDAR station based on the ground.
- Two new site entrances from the L5010.
- New and upgraded internal site access tracks.
- All associated underground electrical and communications cabling connecting the proposed turbines to the proposed onsite substation.
- The TDR including temporary works on sections of the public road network and private lands along the turbine delivery route on the L-5006 and the junction of the R-402 and R-420.
- One temporary construction site compound and additional mobile welfare unit.
- One spoil deposition area.
- Landscaping.
- Associated surface water management systems.

The project considered in the EIAR and NIS includes for an underground grid connection cabling, connecting the onsite substation to the national electricity grid via the Philipstown 110kV Substation located in the townland of Ballykilleen, Co. Offaly. The cabling will be located within the public road corridor or existing tracks for its entire length. The total length of the Proposed Grid Connection route is approximately 8km, the full length of the Proposed Grid Connection is located within Co. Offaly. For clarity, the Proposed Grid Connection Route will be the subject of a separate future planning application.

A ten-year planning permission is being requested for this development. That is, planning consent for the construction of the development would remain valid for ten years following the grant of permission.

The applicant requests the grant of permission is on the basis of an operational period of no less than 35 years from the date of full operational commissioning of the wind farm, with permission for the onsite 110kV substation sought in perpetuity given that the substation will form part of the national electricity network. Therefore, the substation will be retained as a permanent structure and will not be removed.

The proposed site layout is provided in **Figure 3**. A detailed description of the Proposed Development is provided in the EIAR Volume II Chapter 2.

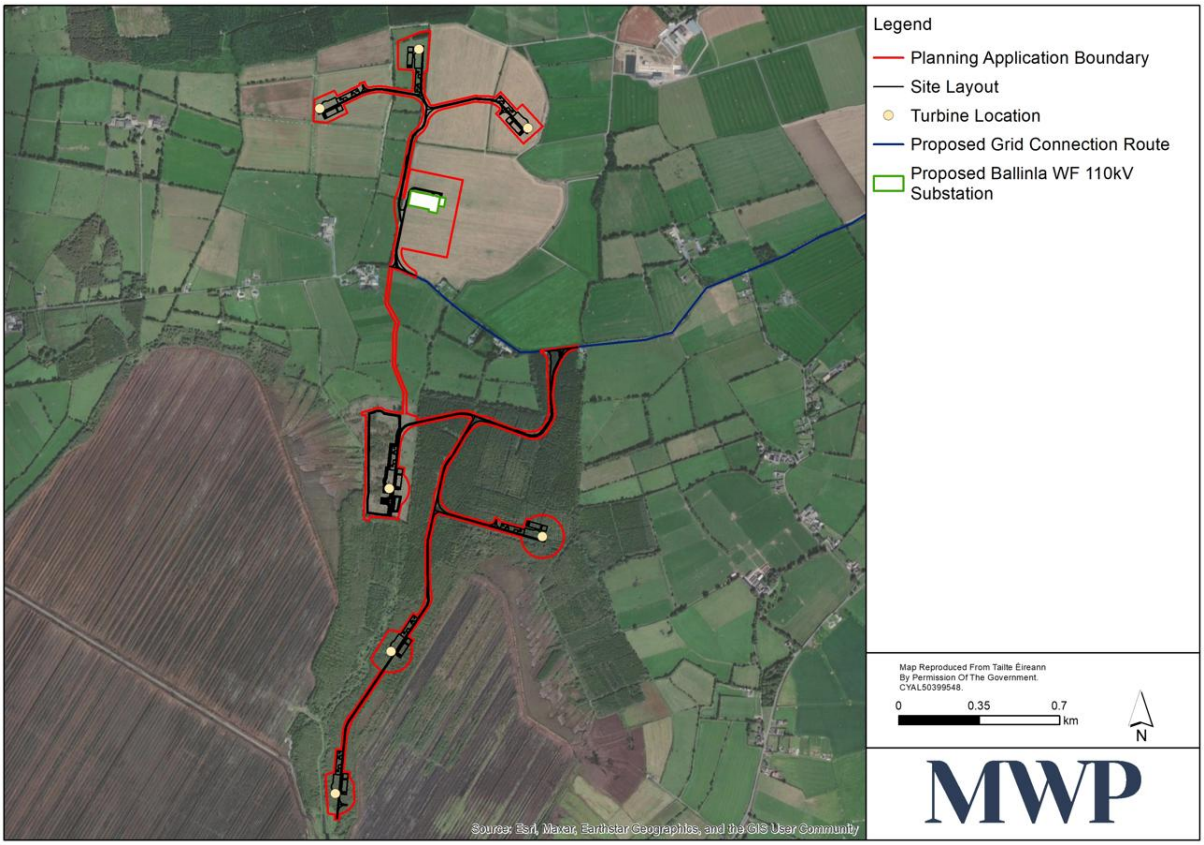

Figure 3- Proposed Wind Farm Site Layout

3.1 Wind Turbines

It is proposed to install seven wind turbines each with a tip height of 185 metres (refer to **Table 1** for specific turbine dimension details). Refer to Planning Drawing No. **23882-MWP-00-00-DR-C-5401** for turbine elevation details.

Requirements for the finish and colour are detailed in the 2006 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Wind Farm Development Guidelines as follows:

- Turbines shall be finished to a white, off-white, or grey colour to correspond with the colour scheme of existing turbines.
- All surfaces will have a matt non-reflective finish.

It is proposed to install lighting on the turbines in a pattern that is acceptable to the Irish Aviation Authority/AirNav Ireland for aviation visibility purposes.

Table 1: Proposed Turbine Dimensions and Co-ordinates

Turbine Ref. No.	Hub Height	Blade Length	Turbine tip height (m)	Grid Co-ordinates (ITM)	
T1	104	79.35	185	655751 (X)	731543 (Y)
T2	104	79.35	185	656181 (X)	731802 (Y)

Turbine Ref. No.	Hub Height	Blade Length	Turbine tip height (m)	Grid Co-ordinates (ITM)	
T3	104	79.35	185	656655 (X)	731460 (Y)
T4	104	79.35	185	656053 (X)	729897 (Y)
T5	104	79.35	185	656718 (X)	729689 (Y)
T6	104	79.35	185	656060 (X)	729191 (Y)
T7	104	79.35	185	655818 (X)	728575 (Y)

3.2 Electrical Substation and Operational Compound

The proposed 110kV electrical substation and compound will comprise an outdoor electrical yard and two single storey buildings (one for EirGrid and one for the wind farm operator). The EirGrid building will contain a control room (**Figure 4**), a storeroom, an office/canteen and a toilet. The wind farm operator building (or IPP substation building) will contain a storeroom, a communications room, a control room, a staff room, an office, a switchgear room and a toilet. The EirGrid building and the IPP substation buildings will be approximately 8.55m and 5.85m in height respectively, with pitched roofs and an external blockwork with plastered finish. There will be a very small water requirement for toilet flushing and hand washing and therefore it is proposed to harvest water from the roofs of the buildings. The discharge from the toilet within each building will go to a holding tank located within the substation compound where the effluent will be temporarily stored and removed at regular intervals by an approved contractor. Potable water will be achieved either through treatment of the rainwater harvesting system or through water delivery. Parking for each building will be located within the compound area. The substation buildings and associated compound will be contained within a 2.6m high galvanised steel palisade fence. It is proposed to topsoil and revegetate the cut and fill slopes required for the substation site.

The proposed operations compound is adjacent to the IPP substation and consists of three 40ft storage containers and a wheelie bin/skip area for operational waste management.

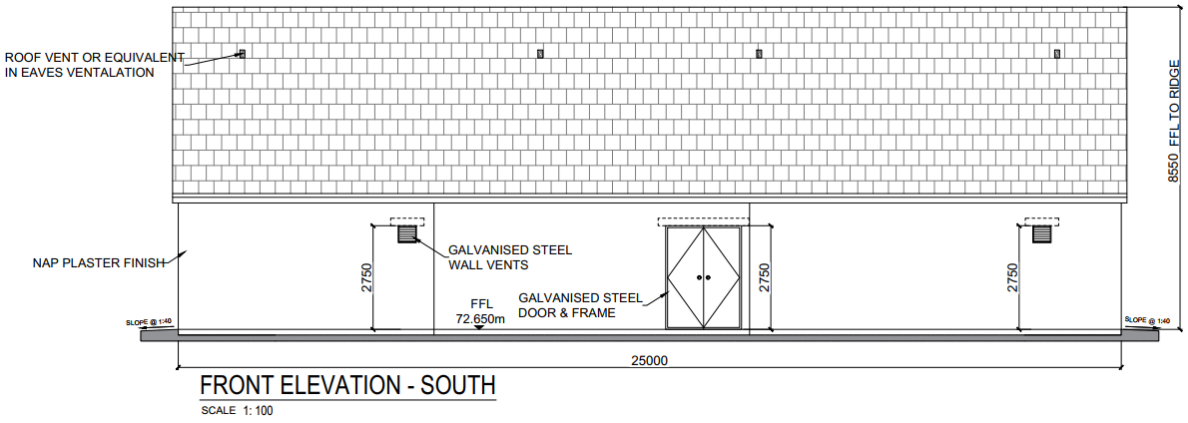

Figure 4- Proposed Substation Building except from Planning Drawing No. 23882-MWP-00-00-DR-C-5423

Layout of the Proposed Substation Compound are illustrated in Drawings No. **23882-MWP-00-00-DR-C-5417, 23882-MWP-00-00-DR-C-5423** and **23882-MWP-00-00-DR-C-5422**.

3.3 Turbine Delivery Route (TDR)

All turbine components for the Proposed Development will arrive at one of Irelands deepwater ports, such as Bellview in Co. Waterford. From here, the components will travel via the national road and motorway network to Junction 5 (Kilbeggan/Tullamore) on the M6. Components will travel south on the N52 towards Tullamore. Due to vertical and horizontal alignment constraints the turbine blades and tower sections will take different routes from the N52/L2025 roundabout near Tullamore to Ballinagar village. A description of both proposed routes is provided in the EIAR Volume 11 Chapter 2, Section 2.3.8. An overview of the proposed section is shown in Figure 5. Route B uses a local road (L2025) through Ballingar, to reduce impact on the local road, this route will be used to transport the blades, which are long abnormal load. The more numerous shorter loads (such as the tower elements) will use route A along the Proposed TDR, which maximises the use of regional roads.

The delivery of turbine components to the Proposed Development will require temporary works on sections of the public road network along the delivery route including hedge or tree cutting, relocation of powerlines/poles, lampposts, signage and temporary local road widening. Such works will be temporary for the delivery of turbine components. There are three locations where works will be required within private lands and these are included in the planning application boundary.

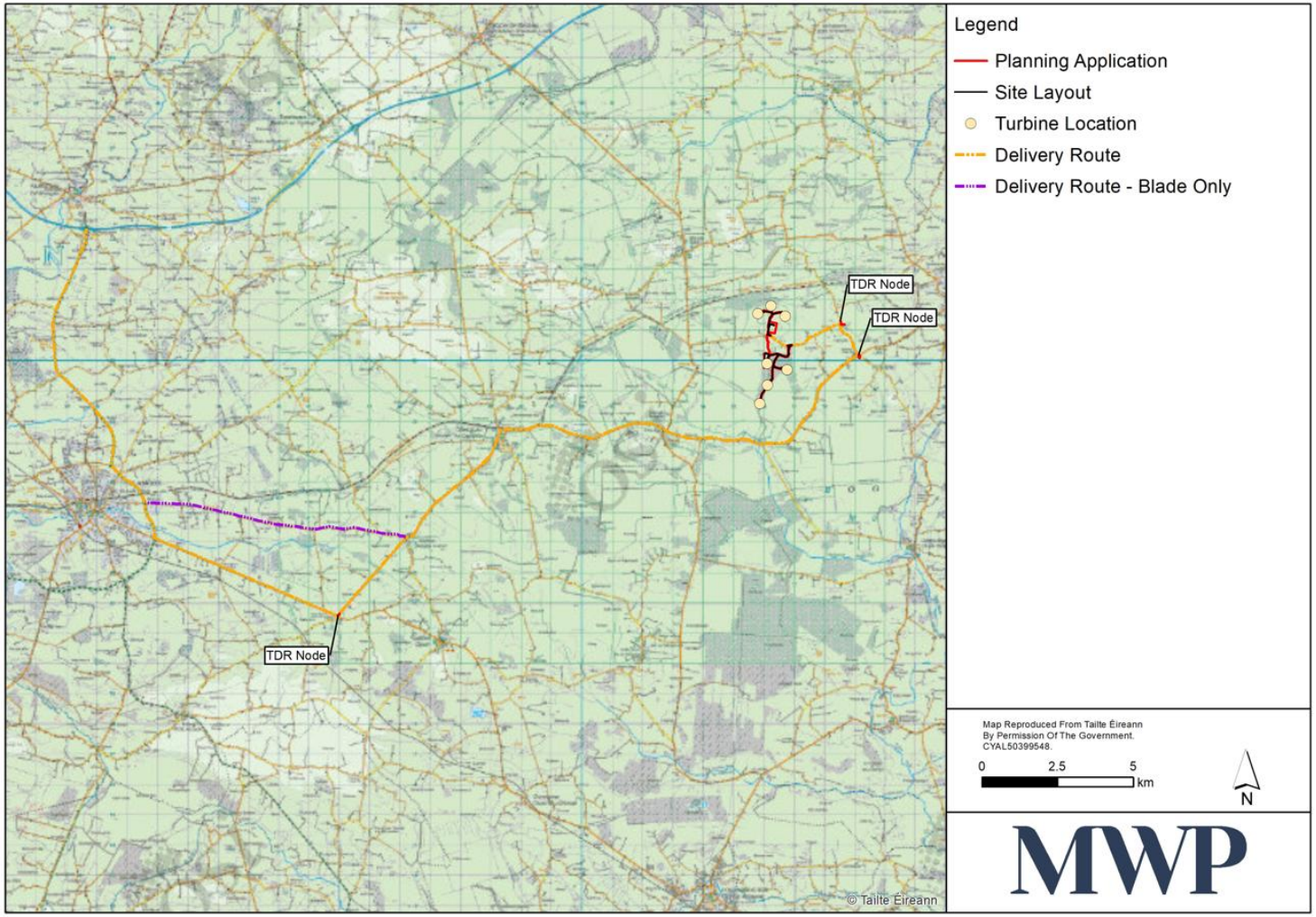

Figure 5- Proposed TDR Route

4. Planning Policy Context

The legal framework governing the rollout of renewable energy has recently been revised, altering the responsibilities of the relevant authorities. Environmental protection laws no longer take automatic precedence over the approval of infrastructure projects that serve climate mitigation goals. Instead, the law now requires a proportionate balancing between environmental and climate-related legal obligations.

Statutory bodies are now legally required to carry out its duties in a way that supports the achievement of climate objectives. In the context of approving renewable energy projects, this means making decisions in line with the goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions. In the short term, it also entails alignment with ambitious emissions reduction targets within the energy sector.

Fulfilling this legal duty necessarily involves enabling the development of a comprehensive renewable energy infrastructure. By nature, this requires the approval of a significant number of infrastructure projects throughout Ireland and other EU Member States. This scale of development must be complemented by non-infrastructural measures, such as improvements in energy efficiency, to meet Ireland's binding climate commitments.

This method of carbon reduction (development of a renewable energy network) is required under EU and Irish law and policy both to advance climate mitigation and also to provide energy security. Within the EU, where insufficient fossil fuels exist to support independence of energy supply, it drives energy security for the region. Accordingly, in this era of both geopolitical turmoil and rapidly advancing climate change, decision makers are legally mandated to treat renewable energy infrastructure as being in the overriding public interest, above competing legal interests. This is evident within the terms of the Permitting Regulations, RED III and the revised TEN-E Regulations as well as within the EU Climate Law, the Irish Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (as amended) 2021, CAP23, CAP24, CAP25 and government policy regarding energy security.

Both Ireland and the EU have adopted increasingly ambitious, legally binding targets for renewable energy share (RES), reflecting the urgency of the climate crisis. As the European Green Deal recognises, climate change is the third leading driver of global biodiversity loss, highlighting the intrinsic link between climate action and environmental protection. Accordingly, the deployment of large-scale renewable infrastructure, while potentially impacting local environments, is indispensable to achieving broader ecological sustainability, including biodiversity conservation.

This integrated understanding of environmental protection means that environmental laws must now be interpreted to actively facilitate the net-zero objective. Without prioritising climate mitigation, localised conservation efforts risk becoming ineffective in the face of systemic ecological breakdown.

Meeting these obligations will require the authorisation of a substantial volume of renewable infrastructure projects, alongside complementary non-infrastructural measures such as improved energy efficiency. Trade-offs with environmental conservation, local zoning preferences, and other competing interests are inevitable. Consequently, decision-making must evolve to reflect the legal imperative to prioritise climate action, particularly the development of renewable energy infrastructure.

The following sections outline the relevant International, National, Regional and Local Planning Policies including any new and emerging policy and development objectives relating to climate change and renewable energy.

4.1 International Policy

4.1.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

In March 1994 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) came into force, with the ultimate aim of combatting the challenge posed as a result of climate change. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) sets out the basic legal framework and principles for international climate change cooperation with the aim of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". This framework was established in 1992 and came into force in March 1994. The framework set no binding limits on greenhouse gases from individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms. Instead, to set these binding limits and to boost the effectiveness of the framework specific treaties (called "protocols" or "Agreements") were introduced.

4.1.2 Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted on 11 December 1997. Owing to a complex ratification process, it entered into force on 16 February 2005. The Protocol operationalizes the UNFCC by committing industrialized countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. The first commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol was over the five-year period 2008–2012. In Doha, Qatar, on 8th December 2012, the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol was adopted. The Amendment introduced a second commitment period from 2013 to 2020 and a revised list of GHGs to be reported on by Parties.

4.1.3 COP21 Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement evolved from the historic United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto where participants agreed to limit total greenhouse gas emissions to a defined percentage below their 1990 levels. COP21 was the 21st session of the Conference of the parties (COP) to the UNFCCC. The Paris agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 parties at COP21 in Paris, on the 12th of December 2015 and entered into force on the 4th of November 2016. The main aim of this plan is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. It is flexible and takes into account the needs and capacities of each country. An article published by the IPCC on the 6th of October 2018 titled 'Global Warming of 1.5°C', notes the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways; in the context of mitigation pathways, strengthening of the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. The Report responds to the invitation for IPCC '… to provide a Special Report in 2018 on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways' contained in the Decision of the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to adopt the Paris Agreement and provides an update on the impact of climate change if emissions are not reduced.

4.1.4 COP26 Glasgow

The 26th session of the conference of parties was held in Glasgow between the 31st October and 13th November 2021. It found that cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are still far from where they need to be to preserve a liveable climate, and support for the most vulnerable countries affected by the impacts of climate change is still falling far short. It highlighted that in principle the Paris Agreement is working, and the session produced new

"building blocks" to advance implementation of the Agreement through actions that can get the world on a more sustainable, low-carbon pathway forward. Some of the key points agreed in the session include: ▪ Countries reaffirmed the Paris Agreement goal of limiting the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C; ▪ Commitment to 'phase-down' coal-fired energy generation; ▪ Countries pledged to increase funding to developing countries to assist with emission reductions and the ability to cope with the effects of climate change; specifically, agreement was reached to double the proportion of climate finance going to climate adaptation measures; ▪ Countries reached agreement on the remaining issues of the so-called Paris rulebook, the operational details for the practical implementation of the Paris Agreement.

4.1.5 COP27 Egypt

The 27th conference of the parties of the UNFCC was held from 6 November until 20 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. The key outcome was agreement on a creation of loss and damage funding for vulnerable countries hit hard by climate disasters.

4.1.6 COP28 Dubai

COP28 Dubai was held in November 2023 and was the first COP agreement to explicitly call for a transition away from all fossil fuels in order to reach net zero by 2050. This agreement highlights the importance of alternative, renewable energy generation projects to facilitate this transition. The deal also calls for a tripling of global renewable energy capacity and doubling of energy efficiency by 2030.

4.1.7 The Renewable Energy Directive

In June 2009, the European Commission published EU Directive 2009/28/EC (the 'Renewable Energy Directive') on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market.

The Renewable Energy Directive (2018/2001/EU) entered into force in December 2018, as part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package, aimed at maintaining the EU's status as a global leader in renewables and, more broadly, helping it to meet its emissions reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement.

It established a new binding renewable energy target for the EU for 2030 of at least 32%, with a clause for a possible upwards revision by 2023. This target is a continuation of the 20% target for 2020. In order to help EU countries deliver on this target, the directive introduced new measures for various sectors of the economy, particularly on heating and cooling and transport, where progress has been slower (for example, an increased 14% target for the share of renewable fuels in transport by 2030).

It also included new provisions to allow citizens to play an active role in the development of renewables by enabling renewable energy communities and self-consumption of renewable energy and established better criteria to ensure bioenergy's sustainability.

From 2021, RED I was replaced by the second Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) 2018/2001/EU, which continues to promote the growth of renewable energy out to 2030. REDII set out a new binding renewable energy target for the EU for 2030 of at least 32%, with a clause for a possible upwards revision by 2023.

In 2023, the European Union (EU) adopted the third amendment of the Renewable Energy Directive, RED III. RED III raises the share of renewable energy in the European Union's overall energy consumption to 42.5% by 2030,

with an additional 2.5% indicative top-up to allow the target of 45% to be achieved. One of the main objectives of RED III is to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy.

In September 2024 the European Commission opened infringement procedures against Ireland and 25 other Member States for failing to fully transpose the provisions of the revised Renewable Energy Directive relating to the simplification and acceleration of permitting procedures. In response to Oireachtas questioning on the matter, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications noted "*Ireland is supportive of efforts to reduce overall permitting timelines for renewable energy projects. However, the scale and complexity of changes necessary to implement these provisions requires an extensive programme of work. Efforts to reduce permitting timelines have been underway, in this context, for some time. This programme of work includes legislative changes to the planning system to meet the RED III requirements. These are being advanced by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the drafting of a Statutory Instrument under the European Communities Act 1972 is at an advanced stage. This SI will amend the Planning and Development Act, as amended, and the Planning and Development Regulations, as amended."* This culminated in the adoption of the European Union (Planning and Development) (Renewable Energy) Regulations 2025 (S.I. No. 274 of 2025), which amended the Planning and Development Act 2000 and associated regulations.

RED III also places the presumption of overriding public interest for renewable energy projects (Imperative Reasons for Overriding Public Interest - IROPI) on a permanent footing. Article 16f of the Directive states that Member States must ensure that in the permit-granting procedure, the planning, construction and operation of renewable energy plants, their connection to the grid, the grid itself and storage assets are presumed to be IROPI.

Most notably, RED III obliges Member States to speed up and simplify renewable infrastructure permitting procedures by ensuring that procedures for granting permits to build, repower and operate energy assets do not exceed certain timelines, depending on the asset type, size and location. Article 16b (1) provides that the permit-granting procedure for onshore renewable energy projects outside renewables acceleration areas must not exceed two years. RED III has been transposed by the European Union (Planning and Development) (Renewable Energy) Regulations 2025

4.1.8 REPower EU Plan

In May 2022, the European Commission published its 'REPowerEU' Plan outlining the EU's path to energy independence from Russian fossil fuels by 2027. The plan sets out a comprehensive framework built on three pillars:

- Demand reduction.
- Diversification of suppliers for conventional (fossil) fuel imports whilst future–proofing the corresponding infrastructure.
- Acceleration of the transition to renewable energy sources.

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."

This policy direction was further reinforced in March 2023, when the EU adopted RED III, amending the Renewable Energy Directive to raise the binding target for renewable energy consumption to 42.5% by 2030, with an indicative top-up to 45%. This represents a near doubling of the EU's renewable energy share and reflects the urgency of deployment.

Crucially, REPowerEU and RED III both designate renewable energy developments as being in the "overriding public interest", a legal and policy status that carries significant weight in planning and environmental assessment processes. This designation acknowledges the imperative to accelerate the rollout of renewables in response to geopolitical, economic, and climate challenges.

The Proposed Development directly supports these EU objectives. It contributes to Ireland's renewable energy targets, enhances energy security, and aligns with the strategic imperative to expedite permitting and deployment. As such, it benefits from strong policy support at both national and European levels and should be considered favourably in the planning process.

European Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/822

The European Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/822, adopted on 18 May 2022, is a non-binding but influential measure designed to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy across the European Union. Some of the core objectives are listed as follows:

- Accelerate renewable energy deployment by removing administrative and legal bottlenecks.
- Streamline and shorten permitting procedures for renewable projects, grid connections, and storage
- Introduce clear deadlines and a single application process ("one-stop shops") to make approvals faster and more predictable.
- Recognise renewable energy projects as being in the overriding public interest, giving them priority in planning and permitting.
- Encourage digitalisation and transparency of permitting processes
- Strengthen staffing and skills of permitting authorities to handle the increased workload.
- Promote citizen and community participation in renewable projects, including simplified procedures for small-scale/community schemes.
- Facilitate Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) to expand private and corporate investment in renewable energy.
- Support innovation through regulatory sandboxes for testing new clean products, services or approaches, to facilitate permit-granting in support of the deployment and system integration of renewable energy, storage, and other decarbonisation technologies, in line with Union legislation.
- Ensure better spatial planning by identifying suitable land and sea areas for renewables in line with energy and climate targets.
- Simplify and prioritise grid connections and plan networks in line with renewable growth.

4.2 National Policy

4.2.1 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended in 2021)

The Proposed Development aligns with the overarching objectives of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This legislation establishes a legally binding framework for Ireland's transition to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, and climate-neutral economy by no later than 2050. The Act places a statutory obligation on public bodies to perform their functions in a manner consistent with the achievement of the national climate objective, including the implementation of carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings.

It establishes a framework with clear, legally binding targets and commitments, and ensures the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term.

When exercising its decision-making powers under the Planning Act, planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála are obliged under s. 15 of the Climate Act to:

"*in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner consistent with—*

(a) the most recent approved climate action plan,

(b) the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy,

(c) the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans,

(d) the furtherance of the national climate objective, and

(e) the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State."

The above requirement is a mandatory obligation.

The National Climate Policies and Objectives listed in section 15, with which the Commission must comply, all support the development of wind energy projects and associated grid connections in accordance with proper planning and sustainable development. The Project, if granted, would clearly contribute to climate targets.

There are no mandatory and non-flexible legal requirements that prevent the Commission from reaching an outcome, in relation to the proposed development, that favours policy goals, i.e. granting permission. The Proposed Development is supported by local, regional and national policy and will be constructed and operated in accordance with national guidance and best practice. It has also been demonstrated, in the EIAR and NIS, that the Proposed Development will not give rise to any significant effect on the environment or have an adverse effect on the integrity of European Sites.

With these matters considered, it is respectfully submitted that the Commission is obliged to exercise their evaluative judgement to reach an outcome favouring policy goals, in accordance with their obligation under section 15 of the Climate Act and grant permission.

4.2.2 Revised National Planning Framework

The Revised NPF represents a significant shift towards a more structured and proactive approach to renewable energy planning in Ireland, emphasizing regional coordination, infrastructure development, and community involvement to achieve national climate and energy objectives.

Ireland's national energy policy is focused on three pillars: sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness. The NPF sets out ten strategic outcomes including a 'Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society'. The Government recognise that Ireland must reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector by at least 80% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels, while at the same time ensuring security of supply of competitive energy sources to our citizens and businesses. To facilitate this transition, the NPF outlines key enabling actions:

- 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.
- Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a low carbon society

Government has set ambitious targets to achieve 9GW of onshore wind, 5GW of offshore wind and 8GW of solar by 2030, as well as supporting at least 500MW of local community-based renewable energy projects and increased levels of new micro-generation and small-scale generation.

Chapter 9 of the Plan 'Climate Transition and Our Environment' states that: *"The accelerated delivery of additional renewable electricity generation is therefore essential for Ireland to meet its climate targets, reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and improve its energy security by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and diversifying its electricity supply"*

The Plan also highlights the important rural areas play in securing a sustainable renewable energy supply, as well as the role renewable energy is in being a new source of jobs and rural growth in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Countries.

The various policies in this Framework are structured under National Policy Objectives (NPOs) and National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs). The key policies of relevance to this proposal are:

- NPO 24: 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.
- NPO 30: Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting sustainable agriculture, forestry, energy, and diversification.
- NPO 32: Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through diversification into new sectors and services, including ICT and climate-related industries.
- NPO 70 Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a climate neutral economy by 2050.
- NPO 71 Support the development and upgrading of the national electricity grid infrastructure, including supporting the delivery of renewable electricity generating development.
- NPO 73 Support the co-location of renewable technologies with other supporting technologies and complementary land uses, including agriculture, amenity, forestry and opportunities to enhance biodiversity and promote heritage assets, at appropriate locations which are determined based upon the best available scientific evidence in line with EU and national legislative frameworks
- NPO 74: Regional Assemblies to plan for delivery of renewable electricity capacity allocations for onshore wind and solar energy by 2030.

In this context, the Proposed Development is not only consistent with national policy, but also a strategic enabler of Ireland's climate and energy goals. Its location, scale, and technology type align with the NPF's vision for a resilient, low-carbon future, and its delivery will contribute meaningfully to Ireland's 2030 targets and beyond. The Proposed Development supports the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services that are helping to address climate change and sustainability. The

Proposed Development will also directly result in benefits to the local economy through job creation. The construction phase of the Proposed Development has potential to create between approximately 100 and 250 jobs. The community will also be supported using the community benefit fund which will invest into the local communities.

The National Development Plan 2021–2030, revised in tandem with the First Revision of the National Planning Framework (NPF) in April 2025, sets out Ireland's strategic investment priorities to support long-term economic, environmental, and social progress. Central to this vision is the transition to a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society, with renewable energy development identified as a key enabler.

The NDP emphasizes National Strategic Outcome 8: Transition to a Carbon Neutral and Climate Resilient Society, stating:

"The next 10 years are critical if we are to address the climate crisis and ensure a safe and bright future for the planet. The investment priorities represent a decisive shift towards the achievement of a decarbonised society, demonstrating the Government's unequivocal commitment to securing a carbon neutral future."

- To deliver on these commitments, the NDP outlines substantial investment in:
- Grid infrastructure upgrades to support distributed renewable generation.
- District heating networks and electrification of heating systems.
- Smart grid technologies, microgrid development, and energy storage.
- Offshore and onshore renewable energy, including wind, solar, and biomass.

The NDP sets ambitious targets for renewable electricity capacity by 2030 in line with the NPF. These targets are supported by regular Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions, which facilitate competitive deployment of grid-scale renewables.

The NDP and NPF require local authorities and regional assemblies to plan for delivery of renewable electricity capacity allocations. The Proposed Development is consistent with the regional targets set out in Table 9.1 of the NPF, and benefits from the presumption of overriding public interest under RED III and Irish planning law.

The Proposed Development aligns directly with these national priorities. It comprises an 7-turbine wind farm with a generation capacity of 50.4 MW, contributing meaningfully to Ireland's renewable electricity targets.

Furthermore, the Proposed Development supports:

- Energy security, by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels.
- Economic diversification, particularly in rural areas experiencing population decline.
- Climate resilience, through low-carbon infrastructure investment.

4.2.3 Policy Statement on Energy Security in Ireland to 2030

In November 2023, the Government published a Policy Statement on Energy Security in Ireland to 2030 which outlined the key challenges to ensuring security of electricity supply during the transition to a low-carbon energy system. The Statement identifies several critical challenges, including the need for:

- Adequate electricity generation capacity to meet both average and peak demand.
- Enhanced electricity storage solutions.
- Upgraded grid infrastructure and interconnection.
- Robust system services to ensure grid stability and resilience.

A central theme of the Statement is the imperative to maintain security of supply while transitioning to a system where up to 80% of electricity consumption is derived from renewable sources by 2030. This transition is not only a climate necessity, it is a national security priority. The Statement acknowledges that achieving this level of renewable penetration will require significant investment in both flexible conventional generation and renewable technologies, alongside supporting infrastructure noting that the "majority of renewable energy generated by 2030 will be from wind and solar". This policy position reinforces the strategic importance of wind energy as a cornerstone of Ireland's future energy mix. Wind energy offers a proven, scalable, and cost-effective solution to decarbonise electricity generation while enhancing energy independence and resilience.

In this context, the Proposed Development is not only consistent with national energy policy, but it will also play a vital role in delivering Ireland's energy security, climate resilience, and economic competitiveness.

4.2.4 Climate Action Plan 2025

The Climate Action Plan 2025 is the fourth annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 and the third to be prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. The Plan sets out what we need to do into 2025, so that we are prepared to take on the challenges of our second carbon budget period 2026-2030. CAP25 strengthens Ireland's commitment to ensuring a just transition through its four principle framework, focusing on evidence-based planning, skills development, equitable cost distribution, and social dialogue. Key developments include the establishment of a Just Transition Commission and work on the development of national indicators to measure progress.

The Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) outlines Ireland's strategic roadmap for achieving its climate transition targets, with a strong emphasis on expanding renewable energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and achieve climate neutrality by 2050. One of the key actions identified in the Plan in terms of renewable energy is the need to accelerate renewable energy generation. The Plan highlights that The Planning and Development Act, 2024, the Renewable Energy Directive and the revised NPF together will ensure greater alignment between national, regional, and local authority levels to deliver on the renewable electricity ambition.

CAP25 sets out a number of statistics in how Ireland is progressing in meeting climate goals:

- The first half of 2024 saw a reduction of 3.5% in emissions, as compared with the same period in 2023.
- The greatest reductions are in energy. Emissions in the first half of 2024 from the electricity sector were down over 17%, which was the lowest level for decades
- Irish wind farms generated nearly 40% of Ireland's total electricity demand in the first half of 2024. This makes Ireland third in the world for installed wind power capacity per capita.

Although the Plan highlights that Ireland have made progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, multiple assessments, including the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) Annual Review and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) emissions projections, confirm that Ireland is not on track to meet these targets. Significant gaps remain in renewable energy deployment, particularly in grid capacity expansion and wind farm development, while continued reliance on fossil fuels threatens national and EU climate commitments. The renewable energy targets from Climate Action Plans 2023 and 2024 have been retained and carried over to CAP25, with a national target of onshore renewable energy generation of 9GW by 2030.

The refusal of well-planned, appropriately located renewable energy projects, such as the Proposed Development, threatens not only Ireland's ability to meet CAP 25 targets but also its legal commitments under national and EU law. CAP 25, the CCAC Annual Reviews for 2023 and 2024, and Ireland's Updated National Energy and Climate Plan (published in July 2024) all highlight the central role of renewable energy targets in addressing climate change.

Failure to meet binding EU targets will expose Ireland to financial penalties, increased carbon credit costs, and continued dependence on fossil fuel imports, posing serious risks to energy security and economic stability. Furthermore, Ireland's national interest, as outlined in Section 143(1) of the Planning Act, requires the rapid expansion of renewable energy, making this a matter of strategic economic and social importance.

The Proposed Development would make a meaningful contribution to the renewable energy targets for the Southern Region as set out in the National Planning Framework First Revision while also supporting the broader national goals set out in CAP 25. Its approval would make a noteworthy contribution towards renewable energy

ambitions and help bridge the widening gap between policy commitments and actual energy infrastructure development.

4.2.5 Planning Guidelines for Wind Energy (DoEHLG 2006)

In 2006, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) published Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, requiring planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála to have regard to them. The Guidelines offer advice to planning authorities on planning for wind energy through the development plan process and in determining applications for planning permission. They advise on land use and environmental issues for land-based (onshore) wind farms. They also provide clarity to prospective developers and local communities. The Guidelines are also intended to ensure a consistency of approach throughout the country in the identification of suitable locations for wind energy development and the treatment of planning applications for wind energy developments.

4.2.6 Draft Revised Wind Energy Guidelines (DoHPLG, Dec 2019)

In December 2019, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government published proposed draft revised guidelines for wind energy developments addressing a number of key aspects including noise, visual amenity setback, shadow flicker, community consultation obligations, community dividend and grid connections. The Draft Revised Guidelines were consulted on from 12 December 2019 to 19 February 2020.The publication of the Draft Guidelines at the end of 2019 followed a lengthy review process including the issue of draft revisions in December 2013 and a Preferred Draft Approach document in June 2017. At the time of writing, the Guidelines have not yet been finalised and are not formally in place, therefore the 2006 Guidelines continue to apply to new developments. Notwithstanding this, the design and environmental assessment of the proposed project has taken due consideration of the proposed new guidelines (e.g. housing setback, zero shadow flicker, community engagement).

4.2.7 Best Practice Guidelines for the Wind Energy Industry (IWEA 2012)

These Guidelines were published in April 2012 as a best practice guide for wind energy developments, replacing the 2008 and 1994 publications of the same title. In the 2012 publication, there is a much greater emphasis on the environmental and community aspects of development, reflecting increased awareness and the need for a higher level of scoping and wider consultation. It is intended as a 'reference document' to complement the DoHPCLG's (formerly DoEHLG) 2006 guidelines and its main purpose is to encourage 'responsible and sensitive wind farm development' that takes into consideration the concerns of local communities, planners and other interested parties. The emphasis is on responsible and sustainable design and environmental practices, external stakeholder relations and good community engagement practices.

Issues addressed include:

- Feasibility Study Guidelines.
- Planning and Environmental Legislation.
- Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Wind Farm Layout.
- Health and Safety/Construction and Operation.
- Community Engagement.

4.3 Regional Planning Policy

4.3.1 Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly is responsible for the preparation and implementation of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES for this Region came into effect on the 28th of June 2019. The primary aim of the RSES is to implement Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework. Furthermore, the Eastern and Midland Assembly supports the implementation of the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan.

RPO 4.84: 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 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: The Regional Assembly supports the Regional Enterprise Plans to focus on:

- Support a high level of economic success throughout the region by building on local strengths and regional innovation capacity.
- Position and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.
- Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR.
- Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy.
- Increase enterprise engagement in innovation, research and development to ensure Dublin's continued competitiveness and productivity.
- Build a pipeline of sustainable and scalable startups in Dublin and provide quality support.
- Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the Screen Content Creation Sector.
- Build an ecosystem framework to support the financial services, payments and agrifood sectors throughout the Region.
- Develop a network of innovative co-working spaces in the region to mitigate long commuting times, promote remote working opportunities and life-style benefits.

RPO 7.35: 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.

RS0 9 - Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy: Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050

The Strategy supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the Region. This includes the use of wind energy – both onshore and offshore. The following relevant Regional Policy Objectives (RPO) are also provided:

RPO 7.36 Planning policy at local authority level shall reflect and adhere to the principles and planning guidance set out in Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government publications relating to 'Wind Energy

Development' and the DCCAE Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland on Guidelines for Community Engagement and any other relevant guidance which may be issued in relation to sustainable energy provisions.

RPO 10.20: 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: Support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission and distribution network to facilitate planned growth and transmission/ distribution of a renewable energy focused generation across the major demand centres to support an island population of 8 million people, including:

- Facilitating interconnection to Europe, particularly the 'Celtic Interconnector' to France and further interconnection to Europe/the UK in the longer term
- Facilitating interconnection to Northern Ireland, particularly the 'North-South Interconnector and further co-operation with relevant departments in Northern Ireland to enhance interconnection across the island in the longer term
- Facilitating transboundary networks into and through the Region and between all adjacent Regions to ensure the RSES can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner and that capacity is available at local, regional and national scale to meet future needs
- 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
- support the safeguarding of strategic energy corridors from encroachment by other developments that could compromise the delivery of energy networks.

4.4 Local Policy

4.4.1 Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted on 10th September 2021 and came into effect on 20th October 2021. The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 outlines the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Offaly. The Plan is aligned with the NPF and the NDP, and supports Ireland's transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient society.

Offaly is uniquely positioned within the Eastern and Midland Region, which has been allocated the highest share of national renewable electricity targets by 2030 to 1,966 MW of onshore wind and 3,294 MW of solar PV, representing 25% and 45% of the national targets respectively. The County Development Plan sets a wind energy target of 466.3 MW by the end of the plan period, reinforcing Offaly's strategic role in delivering national climate and energy objectives.

Chapter 03 of the Plan relates to Climate Action and Energy. The Plan states that the Council "recognise that essential future upgrades are required to the electricity grid in the midlands as outlined in EirGrid's Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios 2019 System Needs Assessment and will support EirGrid in future Programmes identifying grid solutions, in both infrastructural and technological terms, in order to facilitate the electricity targets, set out in the Government's Climate Action Plan 2019 and the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030".

With regards policies for electricity transmission and distribution Policy CAEP-01 states *"It is Council policy to support and facilitate the development, reinforcement, renewal and expansion of the electricity transmission and distribution grid, including the development of new lines, pylons and substations as required to provide for the future physical and economic development of Offaly."* The Wind Energy Target by end of Plan Period is 466.3 MW.

The following policies are identified within this Chapter:

- CAEP-02 It is Council policy to require that, in all new developments, local services such as medium and low voltage electricity cables shall be undergrounded, with multiple services accommodated in shared strips underground and that access covers are shared, whenever possible.
- CAEP-03 It is Council policy that proposals for new electricity distribution lines 38 kV or above along with transmission lines 110 kV or above will be considered subject to the protection of Designated and Non Designated Sites as outlined in Objectives BLO-02 to BLO-06 and landscape considerations as outlined in objectives BLO-22 Areas of High Amenity, BLO-24 Landscape and BLO-26 and BLO-27 Protection of Key Scenic Views, Prospects and Key Amenity Routes.
- CAEP-04 It is Council policy to support EirGrid's Implementation Plan 2017 – 2022 and Transmission Development Plan 2019 and any subsequent plans prepared during the plan period that facilitate the timely delivery of major investment projects subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the outcome of the planning process.
- CAEP-05 It is Council policy to support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission and distribution network to facilitate planned growth and transmission/ distribution of a renewable energy focused generation across the major demand centres. This includes:
    - Facilitating trans-boundary networks into and through the County and Region to ensure the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
    - 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.
    - Support the safeguarding of strategic energy corridors from encroachment by other developments that could compromise the delivery of energy networks.

Chapter 05 focuses on Economic Development within the County. The Council recognises that the energy sector, both renewables and non-renewables, is currently a significant employer in the county and has potential for considerable growth over the lifetime of this plan. The Council will encourage and facilitate the development of renewable energy projects in rural areas. The relevant policies within this chapter are as follows:

- REDP-09 It is Council policy to facilitate the development of the rural economy through supporting sustainability and economic efficiency in agriculture and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities such as the food and drinks sector, forestry, horticulture, crafts, agri-business, fishing, aquaculture, waste management, rural tourism, renewable energy and the bio-economy, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism. Examples of after use and re-purposing of workshops and production facilities could include outreach training centres, gravel extraction, bike-hire facilities, enterprise space / co-working facilities, aquaculture, birch water harvesting, herb growing, resource management / recycling centre, climate change mitigation (such as through renewable energy, carbon sink, data centres, battery energy storage, afforestation including native woodland, a Green Energy Hub, flood management), and tourism (such as through peatways, recreational forestry, wilderness, eco-tourism based on biodiversity, and a designation of a National Peatlands Heritage Park).
- REDP-11 As part of Offaly County Council's recognition of the contribution that rural areas make to social and economic wellbeing, it is Council policy to support and protect existing rural economies such as (i)

valuable agricultural lands to ensure sustainable food supply, (ii) the value and character of the open countryside and (iii) the diversification of rural economies to create additional jobs and maximise opportunities in emerging sectors, such as agri-business, renewable energy, tourism, and forestry enterprise.

- REDP-12 It is Council policy to 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 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based industries and those addressing climate action and sustainability.
- REDP–14 It is Council policy to favourably consider proposals for the expansion of existing industrial or new business enterprise in the open countryside where the proposal; a) is an appropriate size and scale b) does not negatively impact on the character and amenity of the surrounding area, c) has regard to and complies with guidelines/standards including traffic, noise and environmental considerations, and d) is rural in nature by being rural resource based and not urban in nature.
- REDP–17 It is Council policy to support the development of renewable energy in rural areas, where it is considered appropriate i.e. where it is demonstrated that such development would not result in significant environmental effects. Such development will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- REDO–05 It is an objective of the Council to support the longer-term strategic planning for industrial peatland areas, which should include a comprehensive after-use framework plan for the industrial peatlands and associated infrastructure including workshops, office buildings and industrial sites, which addresses environmental, economic and social issues including employment and replacement enterprise reflecting the current transition from employment based around peat extraction.

Other relevant policies within the Plan are as follows:

- RTCP-18 It is Council policy to support the development of environmentally sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and to encourage a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to retail development, for example the provision of green infrastructure, sustainable mobility and accessibility, sustainable urban drainage systems, water harvesting and renewable energy.
- BLO-10 It is an objective of the Council to require the preparation and submission of a Hydrological Report/Assessment for significant developments within and in close proximity to protected raised bogs and to take account of same in the assessment of impacts on the integrity of peatland ecosystems.
- BLP-23 It is Council policy to consider the Waterways Corridor Study 2002 and protect the recreational, educational and amenity potential of navigational and non-navigational waterways within the county, such as the Grand Canal Corridor, towpaths and adjacent wetland landscapes, taking into account more recent heritage and environmental legislation (including the SEA Directive) and environmental policy commitments.
- BLP-24 It is Council policy to support the protection and management of existing networks of woodlands, trees and hedgerows which are of amenity or biodiversity value and/or contribute to landscape character, and to strengthen local networks.
- BLO-11 It is an objective of the Council to work with relevant stakeholders on suitable peatland sites in order to demonstrate best practice in sustainable peatland conservation, management and restoration techniques to promote their heritage and educational value subject to ecological impact assessment and appropriate assessment screening.

5. Planning Assessment

5.1 Principle of Development

The principle of the Proposed Development is considered to be compatible with Planning Policy at all levels of government. Renewable energy projects are supported in principle at National, Regional and Local policy levels, with the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce resilience on fossil fuels and combat climate change.

It is perhaps sufficient to note the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 establishes 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 CAP which implements the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and sets a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050. Wind energy is at the heart of the Plan with a target of 9GW of onshore wind energy by 2030.

The common theme throughout policies at a national and regional level is the need to promote and enhance renewable energy in Ireland. This project will contribute directly towards meeting Ireland's renewable energy production targets and specific objectives for onshore wind capacity. Within the County Development Plan Offaly County Council have a target of 466.3 MW from Wind Energy by the end of the Plan. The Proposed Development will contribute to Offaly in reaching this goal.

The Proposed Development is located in an area designated as being '*open to consideration for wind energy development*'. It is important to note that there are no lands within the County designated as being acceptable in principle for these developments. Therefore, subject to the extensive assessments undertaken as part of this planning application it is considered that a Wind Energy project in this proposed location is in line with the proper planning and development of the area, in line with the policies of the County Development Plan. The site has been assessed as having the potential to accommodate a Wind Energy project.

The 2006 Planning Guidelines and the 2012 IWEA Guidelines were consulted in considering the location of the proposed wind farm, its design and layout and also in assessing and, where applicable, mitigating its impact on the environment and the community in which it is located, with particular attention focused on the chapters of the EIAR that assess the specific impacts of wind farm development (i.e. noise, shadow flicker, biodiversity, land, soils, hydrology, landscape and visual, traffic and cultural heritage).

A community participation and engagement programme will provide a gain for the community in the form of a community benefit fund. Further details are provided in EIAR Volume II Chapter 1 Introduction. This meets the requirements of the 2012 IWEA Best Practice Guidelines which informed both the design and execution of the community engagement programme for the project.

5.2 Design and Layout

The layout reflects the outcome of the iterative engineering and environmental analysis approach adopted during the design process. This approach considered a number of factors, including minimising any risk in terms of poor ground conditions, negative influences on the existing drainage, avoidance of sensitive ecological habitats, set back distances from dwellings, and any known archaeological features. The design has also benefitted from input from relevant bodies and the public. The design rationale and evolution is described in EIAR Volume II Chapter 4 Alternatives.

5.3 Environmental Impact Assessment Report

EIA provisions in Irish Law in relation to planning consents are currently contained in the Planning and Development Act, 2000, (Part X) as amended, and in Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended. The EIA Directive and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, provide that in respect of an application for development consent where EIA is required, the developer (applicant) is required to prepare and submit an EIAR to the competent authority.

This Planning Application is supported by an EIAR. The EIAR includes the following chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Project Description
3. Civil Engineering
4. Alternatives
5. Population and Human Health
6. Biodiversity
7. Ornithology
8. Water
9. Land and Soil
10. Noise
11. Landscape
12. Cultural Heritage
13. Air and Climate
14. Material Assets- Built Services
15. Material Assets- Traffic and Transport
16. Shadow Flicker
17. Interaction of Effects
18. Schedule of Environmental Mitigation Measures

Each specialist impact assessment chapter includes a methodology, scoping, baseline assessments, impact assessment of the construction, operation and decommissioning phases, mitigation, any design changes to reduce or remove impacts, residual impacts and cumulative effects.

The main findings of the EIAR are set out in 'Volume 1 – Non Technical Summary' of the EIAR report. It is concluded that with the application of various mitigation measures, there are no impacts that are considered unacceptable within the context of the planning policy framework for assessing wind energy projects and also that the proposed wind farm is supported by Government policy regarding the promotion of renewable energy and is consistent with planning guidance for the development of wind energy.

5.4 Cultural Heritage

An Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) has been undertaken with regard to the Proposed Development, and this assessment forms part of Volume II Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage of the EIAR. There are no known archaeological sites or monuments within the boundary of the Proposed Development. Several Recorded Monuments and Places (RMP) are located in the vicinity.

The Assessment concludes that there is a possibility for direct impact on unknown subsurface archaeology within the boundary limits of the Proposed Development during the construction phase. However, the risk of inadvertent impact on possible unknown buried archaeological material can be mitigated by a combination of geophysical survey, archaeological testing and monitoring at appropriate stages of the project.

5.5 Residential Amenity

The Proposed Wind Farm is located on a site currently used for agriculture. There are no uninvolved occupied properties located within 740m of a proposed turbine location. There are four main possible receptors with potential impacts on residential amenity as a result of the Wind Energy development which are Noise and Vibration, Shadow Flicker, Traffic and Visual Amenity.

The main disturbance during the construction phase of the Proposed Development will be the generation of additional traffic on the local road networks which may present noise and safety implications as a concern. The operational phase of the Proposed Development is not expected to present any adverse effects on the human environment. Detailed shadow flicker and noise modelling have been undertaken as part of the EIAR within Chapters 10 & 16. A detailed landscape and visual impact assessment has been undertaken as part of Chapter 11.

Mitigation measures have been set out throughout the EIAR for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of development, to ensure the impact on the amenity of residents as a result of the Proposed Development is minimised.

5.6 Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

This planning application is supported by a Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) prepared by MWP. Following Appropriate Assessment Screening, three European sites were determined to lie within the potential ZoI of the Proposed Development:

- River Barrow and River Nore SAC (Site Code: 002162).
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code: 002299).
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (Site Code: 004232).

These sites were screened in due to hydrological connectivity via the Leitrim Stream, Figile River, and Kinnafad Stream, and the presence of qualifying interests sensitive to water quality, hydrological changes, and disturbance. The qualifying interests include Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), otter (*Lutra lutra*) and kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), all of which are vulnerable to pollution, sedimentation, and habitat fragmentation.

An Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was undertaken in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The AA identified the following potential impacts that could result in significant effects on the qualifying features and supporting habitats of these SACs/SPA:

- Waterborne pollution during construction and operation, particularly from sediment, hydrocarbons, and concrete washout.
- Alteration of hydrological regimes, including changes to surface water flow, groundwater levels, and drainage patterns.
- Disturbance/displacement of qualifying species due to noise, vibration, lighting, and human activity during construction or impairment of water quality.
- Fragmentation or degradation of riparian corridors, which serve as ecological linkages for mobile aquatic species.

These impacts were assessed in detail using the results of ecological surveys, hydrological analysis, and design documentation. Embedded and site-specific mitigation measures have been incorporated into the Proposed Development to ensure that these risks are effectively managed.

On the basis of objective information and beyond reasonable scientific doubt, with the implementation of all mitigation measures, it is concluded that the Proposed Development, either alone or in combination with other

plans or projects, will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC or the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA, in view of their conservation objectives.

5.7 Landscape

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) by Macro Works Ltd. and forms part of Chapter 11 of the EIAR. In accordance with best practice a 20km Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) radius was applied from the outermost turbines of the scheme. A Central Study Area with particular focus on receptors and effects of the landscape within 5km of the study area is also included in the assessment.

Offaly County Development Plan (OCDP) 2021-2027

The Offaly CDP 2021-2027 does not contain a Landscape Character Assessment, however, a classification of landscape sensitivity for various landscape types is provided. This utilises three sensitivity categories: High, Medium and Low. The Proposed Development is located predominantly within a Low sensitivity area except two turbines to the south which are located within a Medium sensitivity area due to its proximity to peatland and peatland fringe woodland scrub. The nearest area of 'High' sensitivity in the surrounding area is a narrow strip associated with Grand Canal approximately 500m north of the nearest turbine.

The OCDP identifies a number of areas which are designated as being "Areas of High Amenity" (AHA). There are for AHA's within the study area which are Grand Canal (2), Croghan Hill and its Environs (6), Rahenemore Bog (8), and Other Eskers (11). These AHAs are considered "worthy of special protection and enhancement due to their uniqueness and scenic/amenity value," with the designation being "additional to statutory national and European designations, which may overlap with these AHAs." The Grand Canal corridor is the closest AHA to the Proposed Development, situated approximately 500m from the nearest proposed turbine.

Chapter 4 of the OCDP outlines a number of policies relating to Landscape and Biodiversity. Some of the relevant policies outlined in this chapter are as follows:

Landscape

- BLP-38 It is Council policy to protect and enhance the county's landscape, by ensuring that development retains, protects and where necessary, enhances the appearance and character of the county's existing landscape.
- BLP-39 It is Council policy to seek to ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerow, shelter belts and stone walls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development.
- BLP-40 It is Council policy to ensure that consideration of landscape sensitivity is an important factor in determining development uses.
- BLP-41 It is Council policy to require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany significant proposals, located within or adjacent to sensitive landscapes. This assessment will provide details of proposed mitigation measures to address likely negative impacts.
- Protection of Key Scenic Views and Prospects and Key Amenity Routes
- BLP-43 It is Council policy to require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany significant proposals that are likely to significantly affect Key Scenic Views and Prospects as listed in Table 4.21 and Key Amenity Routes as listed in Table 4.22
- BLO-26 It is an objective of the Council to protect Key Scenic Views and Key Prospects contained in Table 4.21, and Key Amenity Routes as listed in Table 4.22 from inappropriate development.

- BLO-27 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that Proposed Developments take into consideration their effects on views from Key Scenic Views and Prospects and Key Amenity Routes and are designed and located to minimise their impact on this views and prospects.

Areas of High Amenity

- BLP-35 It is Council policy to protect and preserve the county's Areas of High Amenity namely the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone, Durrow High Cross, Abbey and surrounding area, the River Shannon, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Grand Canal, Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog, Pallas Lake, Clara Bog, Clara eskers, Eiscir Riada and other eskers. Notwithstanding the location of certain settlements, or parts of, for which there are settlement plans (Towns, Villages, Sráids), within the Areas of High Amenity, it is not the intention of this policy to hinder appropriate sustainable levels of development (as set out in the plans and subject to proper planning). Further, it is policy to facilitate the sustainable extension and expansion of existing visitor, tourist related or other rural enterprises within the Areas of High Amenity, where such development is appropriate and where it can be demonstrated that it gives 'added value' to the extending activity and to the immediate area which is the subject of the 'Area of High Amenity' designation.
- BLP-36 It is Council policy, to ensure that issues of scale, siting, design and overall compatibility (including particular regard to environmental sensitivities) with a Site's location within an Area of High Amenity are of paramount importance when assessing any application for planning permission. The merits of each proposal will be examined on a case-by case basis.

Objectives

Landscape

- BLO-24 It is an objective of the Council to have regard to the Landscape Sensitivity Areas in Tables 4.18, 4.19 and 4.20 in the consideration of planning applications.
- BLO-25 It is an objective of the Council to protect skylines and ridgelines from development where such developments will create significant visual intrusion.

Areas of High Amenity

- BLO-22 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that new development, whether individually or cumulatively, does not impinge in any significant way on the character, integrity and distinctiveness of or the scenic value of the Areas of High Amenity listed in Table 4.17. New development in Areas of High Amenity shall not be permitted if it:
    - Causes unacceptable visual harm.
    - Introduces incongruous landscape elements.
    - Causes the disturbance or loss of (i) landscape elements that contribute to local distinctiveness; (ii) historic elements that contribute significantly to landscape character and quality such as field or road patterns; (iii) vegetation which is a characteristic of that landscape type and (iv) the visual condition of landscape elements.

Landscape Impacts and Effects

Construction Phase

It is considered that the Proposed Development will have a modest physical effect on the landscape within the Proposed Wind Farm Site, with land disturbance being localised and relatively limited. Disturbance to existing vegetation to accommodate the Proposed TDR, and the required access tracks and turbine hardstand areas will largely relate to vegetation that is not readily discernible from locations beyond the immediate locality.

In terms of landscape character, the magnitude of landscape impact in relation to these activities at the construction phase is deemed to be of a High-medium magnitude within the Proposed Wind Farm and its

immediate surrounds, which when combined with a Medium-Low sensitivity, results in a significance of landscape effect of Moderate, which will be of a Negative quality. It is not considered that the project will generate significant effects to landscape character at the construction phase.

Operational Phase

There will be physical impacts on the land cover of the Site as a result of the Proposed Development during the operational phase, but these will be relatively minor in the context of this working, rural landscape, that includes extensive areas of agricultural land, peatland, forestry, and commercial wind farms. The scale of the Proposed Development will be well assimilated within its landscape context without undue conflicts of scale with underlying landform and land use patterns.

Within the Central Study Area and in relation to the Site and its immediate environs (within approximately 1km), the magnitude of change to landscape character is deemed to be Medium. When combined with a Medium-Low sensitivity, the level of landscape effect is considered Moderate-Slight. Beyond this distance, the magnitude of change to landscape character will reduce to Medium-Low for the remainder of the Central Study Area. When combined with a Medium-Low sensitivity, the resulting level of landscape effect is deemed Slight tending to Slight-Imperceptible. In areas such as the Grand Canal Corridor, where the sensitivity was assessed as being High-Medium as a result of its comparative scenic, recreational, and heritage values, the level of indirect effect is considered to be Moderate for the small section contained within 1km of the Site and Moderate-slight thereafter as intervisibility becomes increasingly limited by canal-side screening. The quality of the landscape effects is deemed Negative, and the duration of the impact is long-term.

Beyond the Central Study Area (5km from the Site) the addition of the turbines in the context of other neighboring wind farms is not considered to generate any notable indirect influence on perceived landscape character.

Decommissioning Phase

The decommissioning phase will have similar effects as the construction phase primarily as a result of the removal of turbines and the movement of large turbine components away from the Site. There may be a minor disturbance to roadside and trackside vegetation that has grown during the operational phase, and temporary stockpiling of material, albeit these aspects would be temporary and readily reinstated.

As with construction phase effects, decommissioning phase effects are deemed to be at most Moderate and Negative, but this is temporary effect that is not considered to be significant in EIA terms.

Assessment of Visual Impacts and Effects

Construction Phase

The visual effects generated by the activity associated with the erection of the turbines are considered in the context of their temporary nature, and a greater proportional focus is placed on the long term effects of their operation. However, for visual receptors within the Central Study Area, this activity is likely to be discernible, and will generate a modest impact on visual amenity, albeit views are already influenced by wind turbines within the surrounding area. For visual receptors within the Central Study Area, the magnitude of visual impact at the construction phase is deemed to be High-medium. When combined with a generally Medium-low receptor sensitivity, the level of visual effect will be no greater than Moderate. Even though the sensitivity of Visual receptors on the Grand Canal and Croghan Hill, have higher sensitivity, the magnitude of impact reduces with increasing distance, broader context and screening of ground based construction activity. Consequently, the significance of construction phase visual effects is not considered to be greater for these visual receptors.

For visual receptors in the Wider Study Area, the ground-based activity associated with the turbine construction is unlikely to notably influence the visual amenity of any given view, given that this activity would be difficult to

discern at distance and due to intervening screening. When combined with a generally Medium or Medium-low sensitivity (High at Croghan Hill), the level of visual effect will be no greater than Slight.

It is not considered that the Proposed Development will generate significant visual effects at the construction phase.

Operational Phase

A Visual Impact Assessment is included in Technical Appendix 11.1 of the EIAR. A summary of the visual impacts by receptor type is set in Section 11.5 in Chapter 11 of the EIAR. There is not considered to be any significant effects from the Proposed Development at any designated scenic routes and views or at any local community receptors.

One of the key considerations for this Proposed Development is the visual effects from the important recreational, heritage and amenity features of the Grand Canal, which runs 500m to the north of the Site at its closest point and Croghan Hill which is approximately 7.7km away to the northwest. The Grand Canal is specifically represented by VP14a and VP14b though it should be noted that VP9 and VP13 are also from bridges crossing the Grand Canal within the local area. VP6 from Daingean Village is also located on the Grand Canal further to the west. Croghan Hill is represented by VP29 which is from its summit.

The highest significance of effect from the Grand Canal was recorded at VP14a directly north of the Site where the three nearest turbines from the northern cluster will rise prominently above the canal side vegetation from a short distance away, whereas the more distant southern cluster of turbines is barely visible at all. They are set back from the canal corridor and are seen oblique to it in a scenario that does not unduly draw from the view of the canal itself. Indeed, in the context of a journey scenario along the canal they are likely to be perceived as brief way-markers that do not draw from the experience. They will contribute to an increase in the scale and intensity of development visible from this section of the canal, but this is a feature that was constructed in the spirit of industry for the midlands. The view from VP14b has a similar context but the turbines are slightly further away and more screened resulting in Moderate effect. This also illustrates the localised nature of the higher order effect at VP14a and how quickly effects dissipate along the canal away from the Site.

At VP29 from the summit of ancient volcano and burial ground of Croghan Hill the visual effect is deemed to be Moderate-slight and mainly due to the High sensitivity of this receptor as the magnitude of visual impact is Low. From here, the proposed turbines will be partly set to the fore and to the east (left) of the slightly more distant Cloncreen and Cushaling developments, overlapping with both of them. There is not a strong sense of visual clutter from overlapping turbines given that the distance between development is clear to see.

Decommissioning Phase

The decommissioning phase will see a similar nature of effects to the construction phase due to the movement of heavy machinery within the Site, and to and from the Site removing turbine components. However, such effects will be temporary in duration and decrease in scale as turbines are removed from view and the landscape is substantially reinstated.

As with construction phase impacts, decommissioning phase effects are not considered to be significant

6. Conclusion

The Proposed Development represents a strategically located, policy-aligned, and environmentally assessed renewable energy development that will make a meaningful contribution to Ireland's climate and energy transition. The Proposed Development comprises seven wind turbines with a total generation capacity of approximately 50.4 MW, located in an area designated as 'Open to Consideration' for wind energy development under the Offaly Wind Energy Strategy, and supported by a robust suite of national, regional, and local planning policies.

The Proposed Development has been designed following an iterative engineering and environmental process, informed by public consultation, statutory engagement, and best practice guidance. The accompanying EIAR and NIS demonstrate that the project will not result in significant adverse effects on the environment, residential amenity, or protected ecological sites. The project has also been assessed as being consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

From a policy perspective, the Proposed Development is strongly supported by:

- EU legislation, including the Renewable Energy Directive III (RED III) and the REPowerEU Plan, which designate renewable energy infrastructure as being in the overriding public interest.
- National policy, including the National Planning Framework (NPF), the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021–2030, and the Climate Action Plan 2025, all of which set ambitious targets for renewable electricity generation and grid integration.
- Regional policy, through the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly's RSES, which prioritises low-carbon energy systems and sets capacity targets for onshore wind and solar PV.
- Local policy, as articulated in the Offaly County Development Plan 2021–2027, which includes a wind energy target of 466.3 MW and a suite of supportive policies for grid infrastructure, rural economic diversification, and climate resilience.

The Proposed Development will:

- Advance Ireland's legally binding climate targets, including a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Support energy security, by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and enhancing grid resilience.
- Deliver economic benefits, including the creation of 100–250 construction jobs, long-term operational employment, and a community benefit fund to support local initiatives.
- Enable rural regeneration, aligning with objectives to diversify the rural economy, repurpose post-industrial peatlands, and support innovation in climate-related industries.

In light of the above, the Proposed Development is not only consistent with planning policy, but also a strategic enabler of Ireland's climate, energy, and economic goals. It is therefore respectfully submitted that planning permission should be granted for the Proposed Development, in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and the wider public interest.