

**Extract from the 2025 October meeting of Offaly County Council**

**Chief Executive Report - Strategic Infrastructure Development - Ballinla Wind Farm**

Mr. A. Murray, Director of Services, introduced Ms. Ú. McCafferkey, Executive Planner, who delivered a presentation to the members on Ballinla Wind Farm proposal. She outlined the proposed Ballinla Windfarm Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID), which will comprise:

- 7 wind turbines.
- A 110kV substation.
- All associated works.

The development is to be located within the townlands of Leitrim, Lumville, Ballinla, Clarkeville, Ballyfore Big, Ballyfore Little, Ballyeakin, and Ballykilleen, in Coolestown Barony.

Ms. McCafferkey continued with the details of the proposal. She informed members that the applicant is Ballinla Wind Farm Ltd, and the application was lodged with An Coimisiún Pleanála on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2025. Details could be found on the website at [www.ballinlawindfarmsid.ie](http://www.ballinlawindfarmsid.ie).

She noted that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Portal notification was uploaded on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025 (ID No. 2025153). The Planning Authority report is scheduled to be submitted to An Coimisiún Pleanála by 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025, and a decision on the application is expected by 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2026.

Ms. McCafferkey highlighted that the proposed development qualifies as a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID). As a result, the standard planning application process through Offaly County Council does not apply. Instead, all planning applications for SID must be submitted directly to An Coimisiún Pleanála.

Ms. McCafferkey outlined that the Planning Authority is required to prepare a report outlining its views on the environmental impact of the proposed development, as well as its implications for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Planning and Development Act (PDA). She further explained that, prior to submitting this report to An Coimisiún Pleanála, the Chief Executive must circulate the report to the members of the Authority and seek their views on the proposed development.

She highlighted the development description includes:

- 10 year permission / 35 year operational.
- 7 no. wind turbines – 185m max. tip height & total generation capacity of c.50.4 MW.
- Substation (110kV) with associated ancillary buildings, security fencing and all associated works.
- A Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) station based on the ground.
- 2 no. 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 turbine delivery route 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.
- Temporary construction site compound and additional mobile welfare unit.
- A spoil deposition area.
- Landscaping.
- Associated surface water management systems.
- The temporary elements of the project include, Construction site compound and additional mobile welfare unit, temporary blade set down and temporary crane areas at the turbine locations and temporary works on sections of the public road network along the delivery route.

The secondary elements that will be subject to a separate licensing and/or consenting process include, felling of c.21 ha (area to be confirmed) of commercial conifer and mixed broadleaf and conifer forestry and proposed 8km underground grid connection cabling from the onsite to the Philipstown 110kV Substation.

She highlighted that the key matters which include, alternatives sites, biodiversity, birds, noise, cultural Heritage, transportation and traffic, shadow flicker, siting of proposed turbines and setback from dwellings and visual impact. Ms McCafferkey concluded that the proposal in principle is consistent with National Guidelines; Climate Action Plan; and County Development Plan. It is located within a wider area 'Deemed Open for Consideration for Wind Energy Developments' (CDP) and recommended that the Commission seeks further information on a number of planning matters in the interest of proper planning and sustainable development.

**Cllr. C. Murray Smale** noted that the company in this case are currently operating Cloghan Windfarm in Co. Offaly where a number of complaints have been raised. She urged that these issues be taken into consideration in the assessment of the Ballinla Windfarm proposal. Cllr. C Murray Smale also noted that the eastern area of the county is completely saturated and doing a lot of the 'heavy lifting' with regard to hosting windfarm developments.

**Cllr. N. Cribben** stated that North Offaly is already well served with windfarms and expressed concerns regarding proposed Turbine 5, noting its proximity to a listed building. He also raised concerns about the location of the proposed development noting it was close to a built-up area; the distance between the proposed turbines and nearby homes; and, the impact of proposed Turbine No. 7 on a listed house (protected structure). He suggested that this turbine be removed from the proposal. He also suggested that there may be alternative sites available that would be less disruptive to residential areas and more suitable for (wind energy) development. He referenced that the subject site area comprises of good agricultural farmland, some of the best land in the country. He welcomed the recommendation from the Planning Authority to seek further information on the proposed development.

**Cllr. A. Masterson** advised that she shares the concerns as outlined by Cllr. Murray Smale and expressed her serious concerns regarding the proposed Ballinla Windfarm development. She emphasised the urgent need for updated guidelines and regulations to ensure that future

developments are properly managed and that community impacts are adequately addressed. She noted concerns with regard to the management of potential complaints associated with the proposed windfarm and how these are to be considered.

**Cllr. P. Ormond** expressed concern about the growing concentration of wind farms in the area, noting that County Offaly is increasingly becoming a region with an excessive number of such developments. He expressed his concerns in relation to the SID process. He referred to the need for updated guidelines (*on windfarm developments*) and referred to the proposed setbacks (i.e. 460m minimum) of the proposed turbines and existing dwellings when they should be working towards a setback of 750m to protect people's privacy.

**Cllr. L. Quinn** highlighted a section within the CE report in relation to concerns regarding visual impact. He further highlighted the lack of details within the submitted documentation on the alternative sites and that it wasn't site specific to say that every field or parcel of land (within the development) was ok or suitable for development. He requested clarity on the site selection process, asking whether alternative sites had been considered and, if so, which ones. Cllr. Quinn noted his concerns on the accumulated impact of the proposal in addition to existing and permitted windfarm and the setback distance. He emphasised the significant impact the development would have on local roads, noting the potential disruption to residents. He highlighted that several homes are located within 750 metres of the proposed turbines, which he stated does not align with best practice and is unfair to those affected and noted concerns of potential shadow flicker. He noted that the most recent noise report for the area did not include the Yellow River Windfarm, as it had not yet been commissioned at the time of the report. Furthermore, he expressed concern that there have been no updates to the relevant guidelines, stressing the need for revised standards to ensure compliance. He noted concerns in regard to proposed Turbine 7 and impact on the properties along the local road between the northern and southern parcels of the subject site. He queried the wording at the beginning of Section 17 (first two paragraphs) as it seems to be contradictory. Cllr. Quinn expressed concern regarding the proposed development and requested that a substantial Further Information (FI) request be sought.

In response, Ms McCafferkey noted the concerns on cumulative impact and confirmed that Members can attach an addendum to the CE report and that a recommendation for FI is set out within the CE report.

**Cllr. O'Brien** expressed concern regarding the close proximity of the proposed development to residential properties, noting that the increasing number of wind farms in the area could hinder future housing and development opportunities. He highlighted that the proposed development involves the same operator as the Cloghan Wind Farm and is conscious of the reservations in this regard. He noted that proposed Turbines T1 – T4 are very close to existing (and future) dwellings and outlined related concerns. He strongly emphasised the urgent need for updated guidelines to ensure proper regulation and protection for affected communities.

**Cllr. F. Moran** expressed his support for the concerns raised by other members. He noted that Turbines 1, 2, and 3 are located within a flood risk area and raised concerns that any future flooding could result in financial implications for Offaly County Council. He made reference to Bord na Mona's public consultation to a potential windfarm in an area that is not open for consideration (*for wind energy*).

He also requested clarification on whether alternative sites had been considered as part of the planning process, and if so, which sites were evaluated.

**Cllr. C. Murray** expressed that she shares the concerns already raised by the elected members. She questioned whether other forms of renewable energy were considered during the site selection process, noting that the area already hosts a range of energy technologies including solar farms, battery storage facilities, a potential hydrogen hub, and a long-duration energy storage project using energy domes. She stated that such developments should be demonstrated on a map as part of this process. She stated that the area has contributed significantly to the national green energy effort and stressed that all existing energy infrastructure should be taken into account, not just wind energy. She noted that these developments create a benefit nationally (*in terms of climate change*) but there is limited benefit locally in terms of road, local community benefits, etc. Cllr. C. Murray emphasised that the area is already heavily burdened, noting that North Offaly ranks fourth nationally for wind energy production and questioned when this level of development would cease. She also highlighted that the roads in North Offaly are in poor condition, describing them as among the worst in the county, if not the country. She expressed frustration that the local community has seen no tangible benefits from the presence of these energy projects. She requested information on whether the application considered other areas within the county as part of the site selection process.

**Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick** commented that the Council had the vision in 2009 to adopt a county wind energy strategy however since then, turbines have increased in size. He noted other similar developments in Bracknagh & Garryinch, expressing concern about the high concentration of wind energy developments in County Offaly. He questioned whether other counties are being considered for such projects. He asked whether Offaly has already met its wind energy targets, given the volume of renewable developments in the county. He sought an update on the proposed wilderness corridor policy/objectives. Cllr. Fitzpatrick proposed that the development contributions for wind energy projects be increased further, suggesting that this could generate additional funding for Offaly. He also stated that locals should be included in the consultation and consideration process, emphasising the importance of recognising the impact on those living in close proximity to proposed developments. He queried the community benefit fund / near neighbour scheme / RESS and mandatory requirements on applicants/developments to provide the required funds.

**Cllr. J. Leahy, Cathaoirleach**, commended the Management Team for asking the right questions in relation to the proposed development. He noted that councillors are consistently hearing from constituents that the local area is not experiencing any tangible benefits from the various green energy projects. He acknowledged ongoing concerns regarding the condition of local roads and emphasised that there is still considerable work to be done to address these issues.

**Cllr. P. Ormond** stressed the urgent need for updated government guidelines on wind energy development noting that citizens and dwellings are being impacted upon. He proposed that a letter be issued to the relevant government department requesting the publication of revised guidelines. This proposal was seconded by **Cllr. S. O'Brien**.

On the proposal of **Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick**, seconded by **Cllr. L. Quinn**, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive Report – Strategic Infrastructure Development - Ballinla Wind Farm.

**Cllr. L. Quinn** requested that the following addendum be included with the resolution above as follows:

- In light of the significant issues raised in the planner's report, with particular reference to proposed Turbine's 1, 2, 3 and 5, this council request that the applicant address each of these issues in detail before An Coimisiún Pleanála makes a decision on this application. It was resolved to send this addendum (recommendation) to the Commission in accordance with Section 37(E)(6) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended).