

An Coimisiún Pleanála
64 Marlborough St.
Dublin 1
D01 V902

Case Reference No: PAX91.323780

From:

Tim Ahern
Orla Ahern
Kelly Ahern
Jasmin Ahern
Sophie Ahern
Sherins Cross
Kilmallock
Co. Limerick
V35 D892

ahernnurseries@gmail.com

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RE: 10-Year Planning Permission for Ballinlee Wind Farm – 17 Wind Turbines, 110kV Substation, and Ancillary Development at Ballincurra, Ballingayrou, Ballinlee North & South, Ballinrea, Ballyreesode, Camass North & South, Carrigeen, Knockuregare, Ballybane and Surrounding Areas

As a family of five adults, we wish to make a formal submission regarding the above planning application by Ballinlee Green Energy Ltd. As residents and parents living within the affected zone, we strongly oppose this development due to significant concerns relating to health impacts, biodiversity loss, community disruption, the unsuitability of the landscape for industrial-scale turbines, the lack of enforceable guidelines, and the inevitable loss of our children's ability to live locally.

1. Community Engagement

Our home and business, Ahern Nurseries & Plant Centre Ltd, is located approximately 1.3 km southwest of the proposed Ballinlee Wind Farm. At no stage were we contacted by the developer, neither in writing, by flyer, by post, by email, nor in person at our door.

Despite repeated claims by Ballinlee Green Energy Ltd that community engagement was a priority, there was no direct effort made to inform us or involve us in the process.

We only became aware of the full details of the proposal after the Bruff Dromin Athlacca Ballinlee Community Action Group organised their first public meeting in Bruff. It was only through this community-led effort that we learned of the scale of the development and the implications it would have for our home, our business, and our wider community.

Several attempts were made by concerned residents to contact the developer to request a public meeting. All such requests were declined, often for what we believe were spurious reasons, including vague references to “safety concerns”. An alternative to a public meeting was provided by the developer in the form of private clinics but these were severely limited in their options and were not suitable for everyone as some people felt intimidated at the mere thought of attending a private one to one clinic.

The lack of transparency and refusal to engage openly with the community raises serious questions about the developer’s commitment to meaningful consultation and undermines the credibility of their stated engagement process.

1. Unsuitability of the Proposed Site

The proposed location consists of low-lying, productive agricultural land, which is not appropriate for wind energy infrastructure, the landscape does not offer natural elevation, meaning turbines must be exceptionally tall to achieve viable wind speeds, dramatically increasing their visual dominance and the scale of their impact on the rural landscape

The site comprises waterlogged soils and established hydrological pathways, with a pattern of recurring localised flooding. It also lies on glacial till deposits consisting of a variable mix of clay, silt, sand, gravel, cobbles, and boulders. These geological conditions create a highly sensitive environment where large-scale ground disturbance carries considerable risk.

Many local households, including our own, rely on private wells. The movement of earth, in particular deep excavation and the pouring of large volumes of concrete for turbine bases and road construction, poses a serious threat to our groundwater quality. Disturbance of so much soil and hydrology could lead to contamination or reduced water quality in existing wells. We feel this is an unacceptable risk for families who depend entirely on private water supplies.

This scale of industrial development, in this case 17 wind turbines and associated ground works, is incompatible with existing agricultural use and risks long-term soil disturbance, altered drainage and permanent environmental degradation.

2. Biodiversity and Wildlife

As Horticulturalists and Professional Growers with over 30 years of experience, we have a deep and longstanding commitment to biodiversity and the protection of Ireland's native flora and fauna for future generations. Through our work here at Ahern Nurseries & Plant Centre Ltd, we regularly provide talks and workshops on sustainability, composting and planting for bees and other pollinators, actively promoting environmental stewardship within the community.

While we strongly support renewable energy and recognise its importance in addressing climate challenges, we believe such development must not come at the expense of other vital aspects of nature. The preservation of biodiversity should remain a core principle in all planning decisions, particularly in sensitive rural landscapes such as ours.

The proposed area supports a diverse range of wildlife, including birds, pollinators, and mammals that depend on healthy agricultural landscapes and intact hedgerow ecosystems. These are the very hedgerows that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is actively funding and encouraging farmers to plant, restore, and protect under the ACRES scheme, recognising their critical role in biodiversity and habitat preservation.

The development poses many risks, for instance the collision risks for many large birds, particularly in open, low-lying feeding and flight areas used by local and migratory species. We have many protected species in the area including Barn Owls, Whopper Swans and Kestrels.

The loss of habitats or at the very least the fragmentation of habitats due to the construction and maintenance of turbine bases, access roads, and underground cabling cannot be overlooked and the increased noise and disturbance during construction and operation will further harming local fauna.

It should also be noted that several invasive species are already present within the area, and any large-scale soil disturbance during construction carries a significant risk of accelerating their spread. The movement of machinery, excavation of glacial till, and disruption of hedgerows and field boundaries would create ideal conditions for invasive plants to become further established, undermining ongoing biodiversity restoration efforts and posing long-term ecological challenges.

Such impacts would contribute to a long-term decline in biodiversity, directly contradicting national and EU commitments to protect and restore nature. This development therefore represents a severe and unnecessary biodiversity setback for an area that should be safeguarded, not industrialised.

3. Impacts on Human Health and Residential Amenity

With a dense population in close proximity to the turbines, this proposal presents unacceptable risks to community health and wellbeing.

Noise and low-frequency vibrations from turbines can and do affect sleep, concentration, and overall quality of life, particularly infrasound which we now know can have a detrimental effect on people's lives up to 10km away.

Shadow flicker can cause significant stress, especially for families with young children and individuals who are autistic, neurodivergent or have ADHD. It should never be a compromise where an individual cannot enjoy their own lives in their own homes in an attempt to provide renewable energy to the greater public.

Many local residents are elderly and living alone and they are deeply worried, particularly at night, that the constant noise and vibration will negatively impact their health and safety but also their ability to remain in their homes.

Persistent operational disturbance can create a highly stressful living environment, particularly for vulnerable individuals, including people with disabilities and those living with depression, anxiety and grief. These concerns are significantly amplified by the proximity of many homes to the proposed turbines.

4. Impact on Children and Future Planning Rights

Large-scale wind farms have been shown to impede local families' ability to secure planning permission for future homes, and we believe this development threatens the ability of our family, and others in the community, to continue living in the area where they were born and raised.

One of our daughters is currently living in Scotland because rental costs in Limerick city and the surrounding areas were prohibitively high. She is saving for a deposit to return and build a home locally near us. Another daughter has recently started her own business in the town of Bruff and is actively searching for affordable rental accommodation. For now, she remains living at home while saving for a deposit to secure a local house.

Given that housing is already scarce and urban areas are increasingly unaffordable, this development raises serious concerns about whether our children and others in the community will have fair access to rural housing, and whether the long-term sustainability, growth, and continuity of the local community can be maintained.

A project of this nature imposes strict constraints on new residential development, undermining a long-established tradition of multi-generational rural living.

5. Loss of Community and Social Fabric

The potential impact of the wind farm extends far beyond physical and environmental concerns. Many residents fear that the development will force people to leave the area due to deteriorating living conditions.

This project risks:

Straining and fragmenting a long-standing rural community

Causing uncertainty, stress, and division between neighbours, families and businesses

Reducing local facilities and community engagement

Rural communities thrive when they are protected and not burdened with industrial installations that degrade their quality of life.

6. Cumulative Impact and Disproportionate Burden

This project places an unreasonable and disproportionate burden on the local area. The concentration of 17 large turbines in close proximity to existing homes is excessive.

We are a small but densely populated rural community that values our way of life and our natural environment. The cumulative visual, ecological, and social impacts cannot be justified. The long-term costs to residents, biodiversity, and the community far outweigh any limited benefits of this development.

7. Residential Amenity – Impact on a Vulnerable Family Member

In addition to the general health concerns outlined, our household faces exceptionally serious and unique vulnerabilities due to the needs of one of our family members.

One member of our family has a disability that makes it extremely difficult for her to leave our home. She has been diagnosed with Autism, Misophonia, and Social Phobia, and has been home-schooled since the age of 12. She is now 20 years old and depends on the stability and predictability of her home environment for her wellbeing.

Social Phobia means she rarely leaves her room, let alone the house.

Misophonia causes everyday sounds such as breathing, chewing, clocks ticking, appliances or even boiling water, to trigger intense emotional and physical responses such as anxiety, distress and panic.

The possibility of constant turbine noise, low-frequency vibration, and shadow flicker is already causing her significant distress. The anticipation alone has begun to adversely affect her health.

Any persistent noise or vibration would greatly worsen her symptoms and remove the only safe, tolerable environment she has. Our house is not simply a residence, it is her essential refuge. This development could force us to relocate, which would be devastating for her health and stability.

This represents a profound and disproportionate impact on a vulnerable individual and must be given full consideration in the assessment of residential amenity.

8. Conclusion

For the reasons detailed above, including the unsuitability of the landscape, severe biodiversity impacts, significant health and amenity concerns, risks to future planning rights, and erosion of the local community, we must respectfully request that An Coimisiún Pleanála refuse permission for the proposed Ballinlee Wind Farm by Ballinlee Green Energy Ltd.

Signed:

Tim Ahern

Orla Ahern

Kelly Ahern

Jasmin Ahern

Sophie Ahern