

Lauren Murphy

From: LAPS
Sent: Wednesday 26 November 2025 16:23
To: SIDS
Subject: FW: ACP-323783-25 - Cloonkett Wind Farm - SID-CL-2025-026
Attachments: 20251126 SID-CL-2025-026.pdf

Categories: Lauren

From: Housing Manager DAU <Manager.DAU@npws.gov.ie>
Sent: Wednesday, 26 November 2025 16:12
To: SIDS <sids@pleanala.ie>
Cc: LAPS <laps@pleanala.ie>
Subject: ACP-323783-25 - Cloonkett Wind Farm - SID-CL-2025-026

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Good afternoon,

Attached are heritage observations/recommendations for the above-mentioned proposed development. Please acknowledge receipt.

Regards,

Brian Bone
Executive Officer

An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt
Development Applications Unit

Oifigí an Rialtais, Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman, Y35 AP90
Government Offices, Newtown Road, Wexford, Co Wexford, Y35 AP90

**An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



Your Ref: ACP-323783-25

Our Ref: SID-CL-2025-026

(Please quote in all related correspondence)

26 November 2025

The Secretary
An Coimisiún Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

Via email to: laps@pleanala.ie

Re: Notification under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

Proposed Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID): Planning permission for Cloonkett Wind Farm consisting of 14 no. wind turbines, a permanent 220kV substation and ancillary development located in the townlands of Carrowreagh East and West, Cloondrinagh, Cloonkett, Burrenfadda, Shessiv, Craghera, Glenconau More and Ballydunee, County Clare

A chara,

I refer to correspondence received in connection with the above. Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations of the Department under the stated heading(s).

Archaeology

It is noted that the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) submitted as part of the planning application includes a desk-based Archaeological Impact Assessment, which was carried out in relation to the proposed development by John Cronin and Associates (EIAR Chapter 14; date September 2025).

The EIAR acknowledges that there is a general potential that previously unknown sub-surface archaeological features or deposits may be present within the proposed development site (PDS) which may be negatively impacted by the proposed development. The Department notes that no advance archaeological investigations have been carried out within the PDS to inform the EIAR, other than a walkover survey. The Department notes that the PDS was



assessed by a suitably qualified geophysicist and deemed not suitable for archaeological geophysical survey. The Department advises that advance archaeological test excavation should be carried out in advance of any development to determine if previously unknown sub-surface archaeological features or deposits are present. If such material is present, then additional mitigation measures to ensure the preservation in situ or preservation by record (i.e. full archaeological excavation) of such discoveries will be necessary. The Department advises that this can be addressed by the inclusion of an appropriate condition, if the development is permitted.

The Department, therefore, advises that the following should be included as a condition of any grant of permission. Note these recommended conditions align with Sample Conditions C3, C5 and C6 as set out in *OPR Practice Note PN03: Planning Conditions* (October 2022) with appropriate site-specific additions/adaptations based on the particular characteristics of this development and informed by the findings of the EIAR.

Archaeological Requirements:

1. All mitigation measures in relation to archaeology and cultural heritage as set out in Chapter 14 of the EIAR (John Cronin and Associates; date September 2025) shall be implemented in full, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the conditions of this Order.

2. The developer shall engage a suitably qualified archaeologist (licensed under the National Monuments Acts) to carry out pre-development archaeological testing in areas of proposed ground disturbance and to submit an archaeological impact assessment report for the written agreement of the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments Service of the Department, in advance of any site preparation works or groundworks, including site investigation works/topsoil stripping/site clearance and/or construction works.
 - a. The report shall include an archaeological impact statement and mitigation strategy. Where archaeological material is shown to be present, avoidance, preservation in-situ, preservation by record (archaeological excavation) and/or monitoring may be required.

 - b. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified by the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments Service of the Department, shall be complied with by the developer.



- c. No site preparation and/or construction works shall be carried out on site until the archaeologist's report has been submitted to and approval to proceed is agreed in writing with the planning authority.
3. The Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) shall include the location of any and all archaeological or cultural heritage constraints relevant to the proposed development as set out in Chapter 14 of the EIAR and by any subsequent archaeological investigations associated with the project. The CEMP shall clearly describe all identified likely archaeological impacts, both direct and indirect, and all mitigation measures to be employed to protect the archaeological or cultural heritage environment during all phases of site preparation and construction activity.
4. The planning authority and the National Monuments Service of the Department shall be furnished with a final archaeological report describing the results of all archaeological monitoring and any archaeological investigative work/excavation required, following the completion of all archaeological work on site and any necessary post-excavation specialist analysis. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the developer.

Reason: To ensure the continued preservation (either *in situ* or by record) of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest.

Nature Conservation

These observations are intended to assist in identifying potential impacts on European sites, other nature conservation sites, and biodiversity and environmental protection in general, in the context of the proposed development at Cloonkett and Glenconanmore.

The EIAR indicates that several habitats within the proposed development footprint area assessed as being of national importance, including wet grassland (6410), active raised bog (7110*) and transition mire and quaking bog (7140). These habitats are highly sensitive to hydrological alteration, peat disturbance, and construction activities. The Department highlights that multiple turbines, borrow pits and new access tracks are proposed in close proximity to intact bog remnants, drains and tributaries which form part of the hydrological network linked to the Cloon River and downstream Freshwater Pearl Mussel (FPM) habitat. This should be carefully considered.

The Department notes that the EIAR and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) tend to summarise ornithological findings in a manner that does not reflect the extensive species assemblage



identified in the appendices. Seventy-four bird species were recorded, including 9 red-listed species, 23 amber-listed species and 8 Annex I species. The ecological value of the site and surrounding wetland/lake network is, therefore, significantly greater than suggested in the Non-Technical Summary.

With regard to Hen Harrier, the Department notes that 65 observations were recorded over the study period, with activity documented during VP watches, walkovers and wider area surveys. The appendices indicate that the site is considered of national importance for this species and that further assessment is required. Despite this, the EIAR concludes that impacts are negligible due to the absence of a confirmed nest. The Department questions this conclusion. The absence of dawn/dusk surveys in 2021 and 2022 and the limited nest search effort (2023 only), means that breeding attempts cannot be ruled out and clarification should be sought on this.

The Department also notes significant activity by kestrel (223 flights), with at least one breeding pair likely within the 2 kilometre buffer. The EIAR states that kestrel has low turbine-avoidance behaviour and predicts 45.6 collisions over the operational lifetime. Given national declines in kestrel populations, the Department considers this impact to be potentially significant. Further assessment should be provided.

Barn owl, merlin, sparrowhawk, short-eared owl and white-tailed eagle were recorded or considered likely to occur within the survey area. The EIAR acknowledges limitations in raptor survey effort, including reduced survey days, absence of dawn/dusk effort, and restricted access to lands. The Department is concerned that insufficient survey data may have reduced the accuracy of collision-risk and disturbance assessments.

The Department highlights that wintering waterfowl and waders move frequently between Gortglass Lough, Cloonsnaghta Lough and the wetland habitats in Cloonkett/Glenconanmore. Turbines are located between these areas, which may create a barrier effect or increase collision risk. The EIAR notes that migratory geese and swans are notably sensitive to wind farms (SNH 2017); however, this sensitivity is not reflected in the impact conclusions. Clarification is required.

With regard to freshwater pearl mussel, the survey work carried out as part of the project has provided invaluable information on FPM distribution in the Cloon River and the Cloonkett tributary. The results are consistent with the other surveillance monitoring (Ross, 2007, Moorkens, 2012, Moorkens, 2016, and WSI, 2024) and the population estimate is broadly in line with the projected population estimates described in the sub-basin management plan (DELGH, 2010) confirming the population is in ongoing decline. The APEM survey revealed



the Cloon River had several reaches of good quality habitat, however silt (plumes), excess macrophytes and excess filamentous algae were recorded in all reaches.

Having reviewed the documentation relating to FPM, the Department concludes the following:

1. This development has:
 - a. the potential to alter the hydrological regime of the catchment
 - b. the potential to increase sediment losses to the river
 - c. the potential to increase nutrient losses to the river, and
 - d. will further intensify land use within the catchment
2. The NIS has presented robust scientific analyses of the risks from the development on the conservation objective for the FPM; nevertheless, insufficient data and analyses have been presented on the:
 - a. potential hydrological impacts from the permanent loss of peatland habitat and exposure, compaction and dewatering of peat.
 - b. the mobilisation of sediment associated with the construction, operation and decommissioning on the wind farm over the lifetime of the development.
3. The efficacy of the proposed mitigation measures during construction and operation to prevent alteration of the hydrological functioning and pollution of the Cloon, in particular, with fine sediment and nutrients has not been demonstrated.
4. The hydrological regime and potential pollution are aspects of the habitat of the FPM and, as the potential impacts on each of these, the potential impacts on the suitable habitat extent and condition attributes cannot have been fully assessed. It also follows that the potential impacts on the population attributes (distribution, population size, recruitment, adult mortality) have not been fully assessed. Therefore, the NIS does not make certain that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of that site, i.e. scientific doubt remains as to the adverse effects.



5. It is the opinion of the Department that the proposed development presents a significant risk to the FPM in the Lower River Shannon Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 002165), has the potential to prevent the achievement of its conservation objective (to restore the favourable conservation condition of the FPM) and, therefore, has potential to have adverse impacts on the integrity of the site

With regard to bats, the Department notes that the EIAR identifies a range of bat species within the proposed development area, including common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle, Leisler's bat, brown long-eared bat, *Myotis* spp., and notably, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, for which a maternity roost is recorded in proximity to the site. The Department notes that hedgerows, drains and riparian features across the site form key commuting and foraging corridors for multiple bat species. These corridors provide essential connectivity between roosts and foraging habitats. The Department is concerned that several turbines and access roads are proposed in close proximity to these linear features, and the EIAR does not provide adequate species-specific buffer zones or a clear avoidance strategy for these high-use flight routes.

The Department notes the high levels of bat activity recorded during surveys. Given this level of usage, the absence of detailed operational mitigation—such as turbine curtailment at low wind speeds, real-time monitoring, and clear thresholds for shut-down—is a significant omission. The mitigation measures provided are generic in nature and do not align with National Parks and Wildlife Service or EUROBATS guidance for developments in bat-sensitive landscapes. This should be clarified.

The EIAR acknowledges limitations in bat survey coverage, including restricted access to several land parcels within the 500 metre buffer. The Department is concerned that this may have resulted in an underestimation of bat activity, particularly for species with low-intensity calls such as *Myotis* and brown long-eared bats. The Department recommends that further survey work may be required to ensure that the full extent of bat usage is understood.

The presence of a Lesser Horseshoe Bat maternity roost, an Annex II species requiring strict protection under the Habitats Directive, warrants particular caution. The Department notes that no assessment has been provided on potential disturbance to the roost, displacement from foraging routes, or changes to connectivity between the roost and key habitats. The competent authority should seek further clarification on this point, as significant effects cannot be ruled out on the basis of the information presented.

The Department recommends that all bat-related mitigation measures be fully described within the CEMP, including clear roles for the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW), monitoring



obligations, and contingency measures in the event of increased mortality or behavioural change. Deferred or unspecified mitigation cannot be relied upon in an Appropriate Assessment context.

The Department notes that Red Squirrel and Pine Marten surveys were not completed due to access constraints. Several mammal species including otter, hare, fox, and badger are known locally. The Department recommends that the competent authority seek clarification on how mammal impacts have been assessed in the absence of complete baseline data.

The Department highlights that survey limitations are repeatedly acknowledged in the EIAR, including insufficient breeding bird effort, lack of dawn/dusk surveys, limited access to private lands, reduced raptor survey days, and low winter walkover effort. The Department considers that these limitations may render some of the EIAR's conclusions uncertain.

The Department recommends that all ecological mitigation measures be clearly outlined in the CEMP. The CEMP currently states that it will be updated prior to construction and will function as a "live document". As noted in previous consultations, mitigation cannot be deferred to future revisions. All measures must be unambiguous and fully detailed at the consent stage.

The Department further recommends that the roles and responsibilities of the applicant, the Environmental Manager, the ECoW and contractors be clearly defined. The Department advises that the ECoW should provide clear sign-off for the implementation of mitigation measures and submit dated reports to the local authority, including notification of any mitigation failure and required remediation.

The Department notes that no comprehensive decommissioning plan accompanies the application. As with construction and operation, decommissioning requires full assessment, including hydrological reinstatement, peatland restoration, removal of roads and turbine foundations, and long-term monitoring. Insufficient information has been provided to conclude that decommissioning will not adversely affect the environment or European sites.

The Department takes this opportunity to remind An Coimisiún Pleanála of its obligations under Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive. Consent may only be granted where it can be established, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site. The relevant CJEU case law should be consulted.

You are requested to send any further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at: manager.dau@npws.gov.ie



The Manager
Development Applications Unit (DAU)
Government Offices
Newtown Road
Wexford
Y35 AP90

Is mise, le meas,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Julie Sullivan', is written above a horizontal line.

Julie Sullivan
Assistant Principal
Development Applications Unit
Administration