

OBSERVATION/SUBMISSION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Case Reference: 324113

Francis Curran & Laura Eagle,
Pollnagroagh,
Athenry,
Co. Galway.
H65RD62

To: An Coimisiún Pleanála.
64 Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1.
D01 V902

Date: 24 April 2026

Re: Observation to the proposed development of open-cycle gas turbine (OCGT) and generator with ancillary equipment.

Location: Pollnagroagh and Rathmorrissy (Townlands), Athenry, Co. Galway

Applicant: Bord Gáis Energy Limited

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Francis Curran, I am 36 years old and have lived in Pollnagroagh, Athenry for my entire life, apart from the years I spent studying Agricultural Science in Dublin and completing a PhD in Cattle Fertility in Cork. In recent years, my wife Laura and I, have built our forever home on our farm. (Planning Ref. 19/1065). We are very fortunate to have two young, healthy sons — Milo (3½) and Alfie (1½). I work approximately 30 minutes from home in Mountbellew Agricultural College as a lecturer in grassland management and cattle production, and my wife works 15 minutes from home in Oranmore, I also farm part-time, rearing young stock for milk and beef production under contract. Farming this land has been in our family for generations, and we are proud to carry that tradition forward.

Firstly, I would like to outline the impacts of the proposed peaker plant on my family. Our home, constitutes a sensitive residential receptor within the meaning of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and is therefore particularly vulnerable to the potential impacts arising from the construction and operation of the proposed development. We built a stand-alone family home in a quiet

part of the farm, surrounded by open fields and rural landscape. Whether we are inside the house or outside spending time with our young sons, the proposed plant would form a constant backdrop to our daily lives due to its close proximity of approximately 850 metres and its clear visibility from our home and surrounding lands (*Photo 1*). As I prepared this submission, Milo saw an image of the proposed chimney stack in the planning documents and remarked that it looked like a volcano. This reflects, in a simple way, the scale and industrial nature of what is being proposed in a rural area.

While I accept that we do not have the right to determine what is built in view of our home, I nevertheless believe it is reasonable to expect that any development should be in keeping with the character and landscape of the area. These concerns are particularly relevant in the context of the Galway County Development Plan, specifically Policies LCM1, LCM2, and LCM3, which seek to protect landscape character, recognise landscape sensitivity, and ensure that development is appropriate to its setting.

In addition to our concerns regarding the visual and landscape impact, the health and safety of our sons is our foremost priority, which we regard as more significant than all other considerations. This starts with our concerns about the potential impact on air quality. This concern is heightened by the fact that our children would be exposed to any emissions both at home and during their daily attendance at nearby schools, including Lisheenkyle National School (approximately 2.81 km from the site) and Presentation College Athenry (approximately 2.52 km from the site). Pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) are known to damage air quality, irritate the lungs, and contribute to long-term harm to both human health and the environment. Although the plant would not operate continuously, it may run at extremely high output when required, leading to short but intense bursts of pollution, particularly during start-up and peak demand periods. The possible use of diesel during these times is especially worrying, as it produces higher levels of harmful emissions, including nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, and particulate matter. These pollutants can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular illness, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, older people, and those with existing health conditions. Fine particulate matter can also travel long distances and accumulate over time, meaning the impacts may extend beyond the immediate area and persist in the long term.

Furthermore, the EIAR Assessment does not meaningfully consider indoor exposure pathways and fails to adequately address cumulative exposure, which could have a significant impact on our health over time. We installed a mechanical ventilation unit in our home to improve indoor air quality. Due to the M18 motorway pollution and normal daily activities in the area, the filters already need to be replaced every six months and are saturated each time. If this plant proceeds, we may need to replace these filters up to four times per year at a cost of €80 each time, further increasing our living costs at a time when they are already extremely high.

Our daily commutes to work and school will also become more hazardous due to construction traffic and on-going operational deliveries on a road that is already extremely dangerous and not suitable for any increased traffic. Over my lifetime in this area, I have witnessed and have first-hand experience of

numerous accidents/near misses on the roads proposed to access this development. I strongly urge, An Coimisiún Pleanála to engage with Galway County Council to fully assess the suitability and safety of the local road infrastructure.

The road contains several sharp bends and dips and is heavily shaded, making it particularly treacherous during frost and icy conditions. This road is not routinely salted by the council. Consequently, Coffey Construction has been required to grit the hill at the entrance to their premises due to the safety issues that have arisen. Members of my own family have been involved in accidents on this road, which highlights the serious safety concerns associated with increased traffic.

Our house and farm exit onto a straight section of this road; however, given the speeds at which vehicles now travel, using this junction already feels dangerous on a daily basis. In my view, the road cannot reasonably or safely accommodate any increase in traffic. I have attached evidence of the most recent accident in November 2024; this clearly highlights the ongoing issues with the road. (*Photos 4 & 5*).

My day-to-day work will also be affected. As I mix working from home and the agricultural college, noise pollution during plant operation will have a direct impact on my working environment.

Overall, our family has serious concerns regarding the scale, nature and proximity of the proposed development particularly in the context of its potential impacts on residential amenity, including noise, traffic, visual intrusion, and general disturbance.

In addition, the proposed construction of this plant will have an adverse impact on my contract-rearing business. As mentioned above the M18 motorway is very close to us. It was constructed through our farm under CPO between 2014 and 2017 and its construction has significantly altered the farm's drainage and has reduced its trafficability and workability ever since. As we farm on a karst landscape, further construction will only compound these issues (*Photo 2*).

The impact of this proposed plant on the environment and animal health is another concern. In 2021, we installed a private well on the farm, located approximately 403 metres from the proposed site which will supply water to the young cattle on the farm. The proximity of the development creates a real risk of contamination of our farm's water resources. There is also a pond habitat on the farm that has been fenced off from livestock for many years and provides a habitat for ducks and other vertebrates throughout the year (*Photo 6*). In the past, I have also seen pairs of swans on the pond, though not in recent years, and I fear we will lose more welcome wildlife if this plant proceeds. I am also concerned about the risks of groundwater contamination from this proposed peaker plant. The development would involve the storage and handling of fuels such as diesel, along with lubricating oils and other chemicals, all of which could pose a risk to the surrounding environment. There is a real possibility that these substances could leak, spill, or enter the ground through surface runoff over the long lifetime of the facility, potentially up to 2050, and even small but repeated incidents could lead to a gradual build-up of pollution in soil and groundwater. This is particularly worrying because once groundwater becomes contaminated, it is extremely difficult and costly to remediate, and the impacts can persist for decades.

This raises serious concerns about the long-term protection of local water resources and the surrounding environment. There remains uncertainty about whether these risks have been adequately managed, raising substantial worries that the project might cause permanent damage to water quality. This would violate the obligations under EU Directive 2000/60/EC, which mandates the protection of water bodies and prohibits their deterioration.

The EIAR Appendix 5.2 Bat Survey recorded high levels of bat activity along the mature tree lines at the back of the farm. This confirms that the existing mature boundary trees function as an important ecological corridor and foraging habitat for local bat populations, demonstrating established and ongoing wildlife activity on the site. Bats are particularly sensitive to light and noise pollution, if this plant is built the site will be illuminated at night and noisy during operation. Furthermore, the intermittent operation of a peaker plant may give rise to periods of elevated noise during start-up or peak demand events. These events may occur unpredictably and may be more intrusive than steady-state noise conditions, particularly during otherwise quiet periods.

The farm is also highly exposed to prevailing winds, and these mature boundary trees play a vital role as natural shelter belts for livestock. The cattle rely on these established tree lines for protection from wind, driving rain and winter weather, which is essential for animal welfare and sustainable farm management (*Photo 7*).

It is further noted that the Tree Survey (Appendix 5.3) records that sections of these boundary trees have been recently damaged in advance of the planning submission. This raises concerns regarding the potential loss of established wildlife habitat and the integrity of the ecological baseline used to inform the application. I was not consulted or informed about the proposal to remove trees numbered 625, 631, 632 and 634 (on the boundary wall) and 643 and 645 (on my land holding), and I would have expected the opportunity to review and discuss this before any decision was made (Document 1).

I am fully aware that all farming activities on this farm and others have environmental impacts, but I have made every effort to promote biodiversity on our land and farm within the rules with sustainability in mind. As mentioned, the pond has been protected from erosion and we have planted new hedgerows (*Photo 3*) which will form new wildlife corridors and support biodiversity. Although I have only been farming this land fully in my own right for a few short years, I am committed to protecting and improving its nature value under my stewardship. My hope is to leave my sons a landscape rich in vibrant nature, yet I fear that if the plant proceeds, these efforts will be in vain.

Furthermore, despite the significant and permanent impact this development would have on my family and our livelihood, no representative from Bord Gáis visited my home to discuss the project with us. As one of the closest households to the proposed site, this lack of direct engagement is deeply concerning. A development of this scale as shown above will clearly affect our daily lives and health for the foreseeable future if approved, yet we were not given the opportunity for meaningful, face-to-face consultation. While the applicant has undertaken consultation activities, these have not constituted meaningful or effective engagement, particularly with those residents most directly affected by the

proposed development and associated infrastructure.

I strongly encourage An Coimisiún Pleanála to reject this proposal based on the serious concerns outlined above and the significant impacts it would have on my family, livelihood and the local community.

Beyond the grave concerns already mentioned, it is necessary to highlight some additional areas that require attention.

Conflict with National and EU Climate Targets

There are serious concerns regarding Ireland's legally binding obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, as well as wider EU climate frameworks. The continued development of gas-fired generation, including peaker plants, will result in additional carbon dioxide emissions over the lifetime of the project, raising questions about alignment with national carbon budgets and emissions reduction targets. In this context, there is concern that the proposal may undermine the State's ability to meet its climate commitments and transition to a low-carbon energy system.

Failure to Properly Assess Cumulative and Long-Term Impacts

There are concerns that the Environmental Impact Assessment does not adequately assess cumulative impacts, including the combined effects of emissions, noise, traffic, diesel use, and ongoing environmental disturbance over time. These impacts may interact and intensify, particularly during peak operational periods, yet this interaction has not been fully examined. The long-term nature of the development, potentially extending to at least 2050, further increases the importance of understanding these cumulative effects.

Without a comprehensive assessment, it is difficult to fully understand the overall environmental burden of the project, and this represents a significant gap in the evaluation.

Lack of Worst-Case Assessment

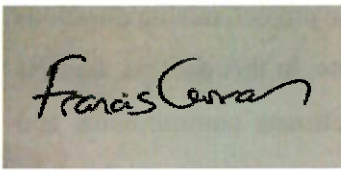
The Environmental Impact Assessment does not clearly demonstrate that worst-case scenarios have been fully examined, with limited detail on potential fire spread, explosion impact zones, and fuel ignition risks. Without this information, the true scale and severity of potential impacts remain unclear, giving rise to significant concern about the level of risk associated with the development.

The Environmental Impact Assessment bases its findings on expected operating scenarios instead of evaluating the worst-case possibilities. Because the plant's operation will depend on electricity demand, it's unclear how often or how intensely it might run. This uncertainty also applies to diesel usage, which could produce higher emissions than those estimated. Without a thorough assessment of the most severe potential impacts, it is impossible to guarantee that major environmental effects will not happen.

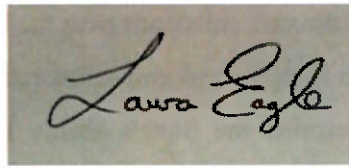
Conclusion

The proposal raises important concerns about environmental protection, public health, agriculture, road safety, and community welfare. Due to uncertainties regarding how often operations would occur, diesel usage, and overall impacts, this development cannot be considered acceptable. A thorough and cautious assessment is needed to ensure that significant environmental effects are avoided, but such an evaluation has not been conducted. Therefore, we respectfully request that permission for this development be refused.

Yours Sincerely,



Name: Francis Curran
Date: 24 April 2026



Name: Laura Eagle
Date: 24 April 2026

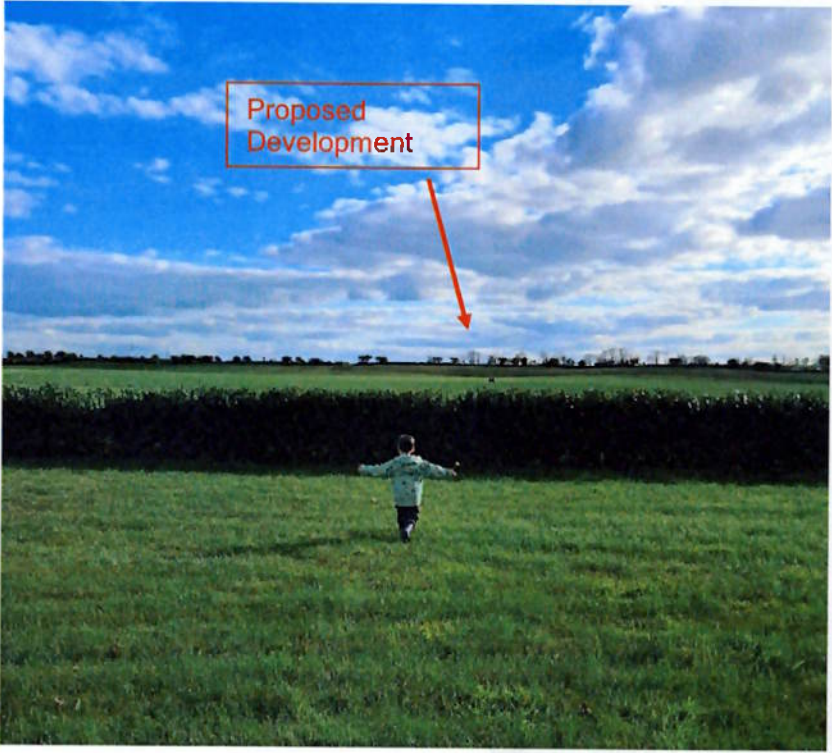


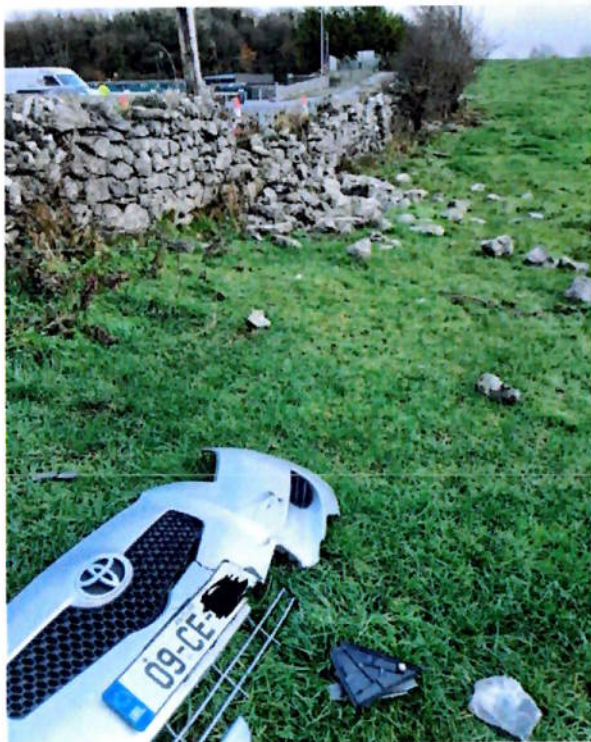
Photo 1: Milo playing in the back garden, April 2026



Photo 2: Paddock 5 on the farm which is prone to flooding since motorway construction, March 2026



Photo 3: Milo and myself planting a new whitethorn hedge in paddock 6, January 2026



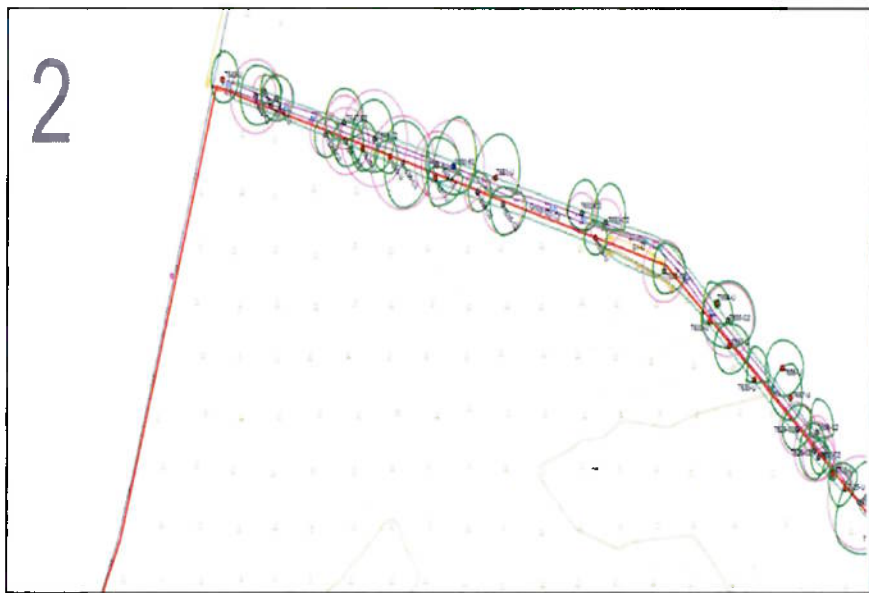
Photos 4 & 5: Damage caused to road wall after recent accident, November 2024



Photo 6 : The fenced off pond habitat on the farm, June 2024



Photo 7: The mature trees on the boundary of the farm, August 2021



Independent Tree Surveys Ltd	
	
Our Lady's Cottage Drummond Rosnallis Co. Laois 087 1380687 john@treesurvey.ie www.independenttreesurveys.ie	
Project Name: Cashla Peaker Plant, Athenry, Co. Galway	
Drawing Title: Tree Survey/Constraints Plan	
Drawing Number: 25026_TS Sheet 2	
Client: Bord Gais	
Agent: AtkinsRéalis	
Date: 05/08/2025	
Scale: 1:500@A1	

Document 1: The tree survey report page 2, accessed 10th April 2026