

OBSERVATION/SUBMISSION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Case Reference: 324113

Niamh O'Brien
3 Riverside View
Abbey Row
Athenry
Galway

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

Date: 10 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,

I am submitting this objection because I have serious concerns about the impact the proposed Cashla Peaker Plant would have on my health, my responsibilities as a carer, and the wellbeing of the wider Athenry community.

I am a cancer survivor, and as someone who has already faced significant health challenges, I am extremely conscious of the need to protect my future health. Introducing a new source of industrial air pollution into the local area causes me genuine concern. Emissions associated with gas combustion and diesel testing are known to affect air quality, and for someone with a medical history like mine, the risk of additional long term exposure is worrying. Clean air is not a luxury — it is essential, particularly for those who have already endured serious illness.

I live in Athenry town, close to the local playground, a space used daily by families and children. I actively support the playground group and its upkeep, and I am concerned that pollution from an industrial plant nearby are linked to reduced lung growth in children. I cannot support a development that places anyone's health at potential risk.

I am also the sole caregiver for my elderly mother and I work at the hospital in Galway. I am concerned about the added stress this facility could bring to our already overstretched public health services, as pollutants are

linked to asthma, stroke and heart disease, which all lead to increased hospital admissions.

Access to reliable, safe road networks is critical for me, both for caregiving responsibilities and for attending work. The proposed road closures, traffic disruption, and increased congestion during construction in the area, and potentially during operation, would severely affect my ability to get to work and respond quickly to my mother's needs.

Finally, I am deeply concerned about fire and safety risks, given the storage and burning of large volumes of diesel fuel close to homes and community facilities.

For the reasons outlined above (health, caring responsibilities, access, community wellbeing, and safety), I strongly object to the Cashla Peaker Plant.

Human Health & Air Pollution

Cumulative Health Impacts Over Time

The intermittent but high-intensity operation of a peaker plant, combined with periodic diesel use, can result in repeated short-term spikes in air pollution. While individual emission events may appear limited in duration, repeated exposure over time (until at least 2050) creates a cumulative health burden. Pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter can worsen asthma, trigger respiratory symptoms, and contribute to long-term health impacts, including chronic respiratory disease and cardiovascular conditions. The cumulative effect of these emissions over the operational lifespan of the development has not been fully assessed, particularly in relation to long-term exposure pathways and sensitive populations living nearby.

Water & Groundwater

Unsuitability of Location Due to Environmental Sensitivity

Given the environmental sensitivity of the area, including reliance on groundwater and agricultural land use, this site is not appropriate for a development involving diesel storage and industrial processes (until at least 2050). The potential risks to water resources, soil quality, and surrounding land uses are significant, long-term, and difficult to mitigate once realised. A precautionary approach should be applied where environmental risks cannot be fully eliminated.

Farming & Agricultural Impact

Protection of Agricultural Livelihoods

Farmers are already subject to strict environmental regulation and are required to meet high standards of environmental protection. It is not acceptable that industrial development, including diesel use and associated emissions (until at least 2050), could introduce environmental risks that undermine compliance, damage land quality, or threaten farming livelihoods. Farmers should not be placed in a position where they are penalised for environmental impacts arising from activities outside their control.

Children & Health

Cumulative Impact on Child's Development

Fine particulate matter can travel significant distances and accumulate over time, meaning children may be exposed not only during peak events but also through repeated low-level exposure. The cumulative effect of these exposures is particularly concerning during key stages of physical development, where long-term impacts on lung function and overall health may arise.

Local Roads, Safety & Schools

Unsuitability of Rural Road Network

The proposed site entrance is located on an exceptionally dangerous section of the L3103. Establishing an access point at this specific location introduces an unacceptable level of risk due to several compounding hazards:

- Severely Restricted Width: The road is currently too narrow to safely permit two Heavy Goods Vehicles to pass simultaneously.
- Absence of a Hard Shoulder: There is no safe refuge or margin for error for manoeuvring vehicles.
- Critically Poor Visibility: The immediate area is affected by blind dips and blind corners, severely compromising driver sightlines.

These immediate dangers constitute a severe threat to public safety and require urgent and mandatory remediation.

In addition to these existing hazards, local roads are not designed to accommodate sustained industrial traffic. The interaction between heavy goods vehicles, farm machinery, and everyday residential traffic creates a complex and potentially dangerous road environment. The introduction of additional industrial traffic, including diesel deliveries and construction vehicles, further compounds these risks.

Fire Safety & Major Accident Hazards

Emergency Response and Adequacy of Assessment

There is insufficient information provided regarding emergency response planning, including evacuation procedures, coordination with local emergency services, and the ability to respond effectively to a major incident. This is of particular concern in a rural area with constrained road infrastructure. Taken together, the absence of detailed worst-case analysis and robust emergency planning means it has not been demonstrated that risks to human health and safety have been reduced to an acceptable level.

Visual Impact & Landscape

Scale, Integration, and Rural Context

The scale and industrial nature of the proposed development are not consistent with the surrounding rural environment. The introduction of large-scale plant, structures, and associated infrastructure will create a visually dominant feature in the landscape that is out of character with existing development. It has not been demonstrated that the development can be successfully integrated into its surroundings. This raises concerns under Policy GB1 of the Galway County Development Plan, which requires that developments be designed and located to integrate effectively into the landscape.

Climate Impact

Conflict with National and EU Climate Targets

Ireland has legally binding obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and 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. This raises concerns regarding consistency with national carbon budgets and the State's ability to meet its climate targets.

Community Engagement

Lack of Transparency, Inclusiveness, and Early Engagement

I do not believe that consultation has been clear, inclusive, or effective. For a development of this scale and potential impact, there should have been proactive, transparent, and early engagement with the local community. This includes clear communication, accessible materials, and sufficient time for people to understand and respond to the proposal. The lack of meaningful engagement raises concerns regarding fairness, transparency, and the overall integrity of the planning process. Communities should not be placed at a disadvantage due to inaccessible information or limited consultation.

Planning & Assessment

Complexity of EIAR and Barriers to Public Understanding

While the development is presented within a single Environmental Impact Assessment Report, the scale, volume, and complexity of the documentation make it extremely difficult for the public to understand the project in its entirety. The level of technical detail, combined with the structure of the documentation, creates a barrier to meaningful engagement. Although not formally divided across separate EIARs, the practical effect is like fragmentation, as the public cannot easily assess cumulative impacts across all aspects of the development. This raises concerns regarding transparency and accessibility in the planning process.

Operational Uncertainty and Lack of Enforceable Limits

There is no clear or enforceable limit on how often or how long the plant will operate. As a demand-led facility, operation may be more frequent or prolonged than assumed in the Environmental Impact Assessment. This includes diesel use during start-up and operation. If this occurs, impacts such as emissions, noise, and traffic may be significantly greater than predicted. This uncertainty raises concerns regarding the accuracy of the assessment.

Protection of Community, Health, and Environment

This proposal raises real and valid concerns for people, public health, agriculture, and the local environment. The complexity of the documentation and limitations in community engagement have made it difficult for the public to fully participate in the decision-making process. Communities should not be exposed to uncertain and potentially significant environmental impacts. I strongly urge that planning permission is not granted.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Niamh O'Brien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Niamh" and the last name "O'Brien" clearly distinguishable.

Name: Niamh O'Brien

Date: 10 April 2026