

OBSERVATION/SUBMISSION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Case Reference: 324113

Pat Morrissey

Athenry

Galway

Galway

H65KC60

To: An Coimisiún Pleanála

64 Marlborough Street

Dublin 1

D01 V902

Date: 17 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 Pat Morrissey, and I have lived in the local area for the past 20+ years with my wife, Mary Duggan. I have spent my life in this community and have recently decided to retire to Mary's farm in order to enjoy a quiet and peaceful life, with clean country air and no risk of pollution.

I wish to express my serious concerns regarding the proposed plant and its potential impact on the local community.

Air Quality

Air quality is a significant concern, particularly for residents with underlying respiratory conditions. Any deterioration in air quality would directly undermine the clean rural environment that people in this area depend on and value. It could have serious health consequences for vulnerable members of the community.

Road Infrastructure and Safety

The majority of local roads are narrow, single carriageways where two vehicles cannot safely pass. The addition of frequent heavy construction traffic will create dangerous conditions. This represents a substantial road safety risk for residents, pedestrians, and other road users.

Furthermore:

An independent assessment of the local water network (community scheme) should be carried out both before and after construction. This assessment should be fully funded by Bord Gáis Energy to ensure the continued integrity and functionality of the system.

Road ducting works should be coordinated with the local water scheme, with all associated or additional costs covered in full.

Emergency Services Access

Restricted road access and increased traffic will significantly hinder emergency services. As members of the local community and first responders, we understand the critical importance of timely access to homes. Any delays caused by construction traffic or inadequate road infrastructure could have serious or even life-threatening consequences.

High-Intensity Emissions and Diesel Impacts

I am concerned about the potential impact of air pollution from this proposed development. 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. In summary, I have reservations regarding the thoroughness of the assessment of these emissions. This issue presents significant implications for public health and environmental protection, especially in relation to EU air quality standards established by Directive 2008/50/EC.

Cumulative Health Impacts Over Time

I have serious concerns about how this proposed peaker plant would operate over time. Although it would run intermittently, it would do so at extremely high intensity, and the potential use of diesel adds to these concerns, as it could result in repeated short-term spikes in air pollution. While individual emission events may be brief, the fact that they could occur repeatedly over many years—potentially up to 2050—raises concerns about ongoing exposure and cumulative health impacts.

Pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter are known to worsen asthma, trigger respiratory symptoms, and contribute to long-term conditions including chronic respiratory and cardiovascular disease. This is particularly concerning for nearby residents, especially vulnerable groups such as children, older people, and those with existing health conditions. There is still uncertainty regarding whether the lasting and cumulative effects of these emissions have been fully studied, which leads to real concerns that continued exposure during the development's lifetime could affect public health and wellbeing in the future.

Risk of Groundwater Contamination from Fuel Storage and Handling

I am concerned about the risks of soil and 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.

Vulnerability to Diesel-Related Air Pollution

As a parent living in the area, I am particularly concerned about the potential impact of this proposed development on children's health. Children are particularly susceptible to the effects of air pollution because of their developing respiratory systems, elevated respiration rates, and greater exposure to outdoor environments. Although peaker plants do not function on a continuous basis, they can produce significantly elevated levels of output during initial start-up phases or times of peak energy demand. This may lead to brief yet significant emissions of pollutants, particularly when diesel fuel is utilised. These emissions contain fine particles and nitrogen oxides that can penetrate deep into the lungs, which may affect lung development and increase the risk of respiratory conditions such as asthma. Overall, this raises serious concerns about the health and wellbeing of children and whether these risks have been fully considered.

Increased Heavy Traffic and Diesel Transport Risks

As someone who lives locally and uses this road, I am concerned about road safety in relation to the proposed entrance on the L3103. This stretch of road is already extremely narrow, with no hard shoulder, making it difficult for two heavy goods vehicles to pass safely and leaving no margin for error. Visibility is also poor due to blind dips and sharp bends, meaning drivers often cannot see oncoming traffic in time. The proposed development would increase traffic levels, including heavy goods vehicles, construction traffic, and fuel deliveries such as diesel tankers, all of which require space and clear sightlines that this road does not provide.

Given that these rural roads are used by residents, farm machinery, and school-related traffic, the addition of significant industrial traffic would increase the risk of accidents and create a more hazardous environment. Overall, there is strong concern that the existing road infrastructure is not suitable for this level of traffic and that the associated safety risks have not been adequately addressed.

Unsuitability of Rural Road Network

There are serious concerns about the proposed site entrance on the L3103, which is an exceptionally dangerous stretch of road where introducing an access point would create an unacceptable level of risk. The road is extremely narrow and cannot safely accommodate two heavy goods vehicles passing at the same time, there is no hard shoulder to allow for safe manoeuvring or recovery, and visibility is severely limited due to blind dips and sharp corners. These are significant existing hazards that already pose a real danger to road users, and the addition of a site entrance would further increase that risk.

There are also concerns regarding the suitability of local roads for this type of traffic. Rural roads are not built to support continuous industrial activity, and when heavy trucks, farm equipment, and regular local vehicles share these routes, it often leads to difficult and dangerous traffic conditions. The introduction of additional

industrial traffic, including construction vehicles and diesel deliveries, would further increase the risk and make these roads more dangerous for all users.

Risk of Fire and Explosion from Fuel Storage

As someone living in the area, I am very concerned about the safety risks associated with this proposed development. The project involves the storage, handling, and use of highly flammable fuels such as natural gas and diesel, which carry an inherent risk of fire or explosion. In the event of equipment malfunctions, leaks, or operational challenges, these substances may pose an ignition risk, potentially resulting in significant incidents. Considering the intermittent yet high-intensity operation of a peaker plant, the likelihood of such occurrences warrants careful consideration.

The potential consequences are particularly worrying, as any incident could have serious impacts on nearby homes, residents, farmland, and livestock. This raises significant concerns about whether the risks have been fully assessed and whether this location is appropriate for a development of this nature.

Proximity and Worst-Case Scenario Risks

There are serious concerns about the location of this proposed development, given its proximity to residential homes, agricultural land, and local infrastructure. In this context, even a low-probability event could have serious consequences for public safety, property, and the local rural economy. While such incidents may be unlikely, the potential impact of events such as fire, explosion, or fuel-related incidents could be significant, particularly given how close the development is to where people live and work. 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.

Scale, Integration, and Rural Context

There are serious concerns that the scale and industrial nature of the proposed development are not in keeping with the surrounding rural environment. Building large-scale plants, structures, and infrastructure would result in a prominent addition to the landscape that does not match the area's current appearance. There is no evidence showing this development could blend into its environment or that its visual effects could be properly reduced. This raises concerns in relation to the Galway County Development Plan, particularly Policy GB1, which requires that developments be designed and located in a manner that allows them to integrate effectively into the landscape.

Underestimation of Operational Emissions

There are concerns that the Environmental Impact Assessment may underestimate the emissions associated with the proposed development by relying on assumed operating patterns. As a demand-led facility, the plant may operate more frequently or for longer periods than predicted, particularly during times of pressure on the energy system. This creates uncertainty around the total level of greenhouse gas emissions over the lifetime of the project and raises concerns that the full climate impact of the development has not been adequately assessed.

Lack of Clear, Accessible, and Effective Communication

There are concerns that community engagement in relation to this project has been insufficient and ineffective. Many residents did not receive any direct communication or notification about the proposed

development, and while some individuals report receiving a flyer or attending an information event, the material provided was highly technical and difficult to understand without specialist knowledge. This limits meaningful public participation, as effective consultation requires information to be accessible, clearly explained, and actively communicated to all affected members of the community. In this case, the complexity and level of technical detail in the documentation creates a barrier to understanding, meaning that many people cannot fully assess the potential impacts of the development.

Absence of Worst-Case Scenario Assessment

There are concerns that the Environmental Impact Assessment relies on assumed or typical operating scenarios rather than fully assessing worst-case conditions. As a demand-led facility, a peaker plant may operate more frequently, for longer periods, or at higher intensity than predicted, and this may include the use of diesel during start-up, testing, or operational phases. As a result, actual emissions and environmental impacts could be significantly greater than those modelled. A comprehensive evaluation of worst-case scenarios is essential to ensure the reliability of the assessment. Without such an analysis, it is not possible to affirm with confidence that major negative environmental impacts will be avoided, and this omission constitutes a critical limitation.


Lack of Worst-Case Assessment

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

Due to the concerns mentioned—such as uncertainty about how often operations will occur, overall environmental impacts, and risks related to diesel use—this project is not viewed as proper or sustainable development. There has also been insufficient consideration of the possibility that the actual impacts could be greater than those evaluated. Therefore, we respectfully ask that approval for this application be refused.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by a smaller 'M'.

Name: Pat Morrissey
Date: 17 April 2026