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Objection to Proposed Wind Farm Development at Lemanaghan, Co. Offaly

1. Introduction

This submission is made in respect of the proposed wind farm development comprising 15 wind turbines at Lemanaghan, Co. Offaly.

While I acknowledge and support the national and international need to transition toward renewable energy sources, including wind energy, this support must be balanced with the protection of Ireland's cultural heritage. It is my considered view that the proposed development represents an inappropriate siting of large-scale industrial infrastructure within a highly sensitive archaeological and cultural landscape.

2. Professional Expertise and Engagement with the Site

I have a long-standing professional and research-based engagement with the Lemanaghan monastic landscape, informed by sustained study, documentation, and interpretation of the site over a number of years. This includes detailed work on its archaeological features, wider setting, and associated cultural practices.

In my capacity as co-author of *St. Manchan's Shrine: Art and Devotion in 12th Century Ireland* (with Griffin Murray), and as Artistic Director of *Caimin O'Brien's Stories from a Sacred Landscape*, I have examined and presented Lemanaghan as a site of significant historical, archaeological, and cultural value.¹ This work has involved sustained engagement with both the material heritage of the site and its continuing role within local tradition, including the pilgrim path and associated practices.

This experience informs the observations set out below.

3. Archaeological and Historical Significance

The site at Lemanaghan is an early medieval monastic settlement of considerable national importance. It contains a range of archaeological features including ecclesiastical enclosures, grave slabs, holy well, togher, burial grounds, and associated subsurface remains.

However, the significance of Lemanaghan extends beyond its individual recorded monuments. It represents a coherent historic landscape, where archaeological features, tradition, and environment combine to form a unified cultural asset. The survival of this landscape in a relatively undisturbed condition significantly enhances its research, educational, and cultural value.

4. Importance of Setting and Cultural Landscape

A defining characteristic of the Lemanaghan monastic site is its setting within an open and largely unspoilt bog landscape. This setting is fundamental to the site's character and to the understanding of its early medieval origins.

The relationship between the monastic remains and this surrounding landscape is intrinsic and cannot be meaningfully separated. Early monastic communities deliberately chose remote and marginal environments, and this context remains legible at Lemanaghan today.

The site also retains strong associations with pilgrimage and local tradition. These intangible cultural practices are directly connected to the physical and visual environment, reinforcing the importance of preserving the landscape in which they occur.

5. Visual and Landscape Impact

The proposed development would introduce 15 large-scale wind turbines of significant height into the immediate and wider setting of the monastic site.

Such structures would:

- Be visible over considerable distances within a flat landscape
- Dominate the skyline and interrupt key views
- Introduce constant movement through rotating blades
- Require aviation lighting and associated infrastructure
- Necessitate access roads and ground disturbance

Given the openness of the surrounding bogland, the turbines would form a highly prominent and intrusive visual presence. This would fundamentally alter the character of the area from a quiet, historically resonant landscape to one defined by industrial-scale infrastructure.

6. Concerns Regarding Photomontages and Visual Impact Assessment

Serious concerns arise in relation to the photomontages and visual impact assessment material submitted in support of the proposed development.

Photomontages are a key tool in evaluating the visual impact of a development of this scale. As such, they must present an accurate, balanced, and representative depiction of the likely effects on the receiving landscape. In this instance, it is considered that the material submitted does not adequately reflect the true visual impact of the proposed turbines on the Lemanaghan monastic site and its setting.

In particular, the selected viewpoints appear limited and do not fully represent the experience of the site as encountered by visitors, pilgrims, or members of the local community. The positioning and framing of these viewpoints give rise to concern that the visual presence of the turbines has been minimised rather than objectively illustrated.

Furthermore, the photomontages appear to be composed in a manner that constrains or “cradles” the turbines within the landscape, thereby reducing their perceived scale and prominence. This approach does not reflect the likely reality of wide-ranging visibility across an open bogland setting, where such structures would be expected to dominate the skyline.

It is also noted that the imagery provided appears to rely on summer conditions, where foliage on deciduous trees may partially obscure views. This does not represent the full range of seasonal conditions. During autumn and winter months, when tree cover is significantly reduced, the visibility and prominence of the turbines would be considerably greater. The absence of winter photomontages therefore represents a significant omission in assessing the true visual impact of the development.

Given the sensitivity of the Lemanaghan landscape and the importance of its visual integrity, it is essential that any visual impact assessment fully and transparently represents the extent of change. The current photomontages do not appear to meet this standard.

In the absence of accurate, representative, and seasonally comprehensive visualisations, it is submitted that a precautionary approach should be adopted. In such circumstances, the potential for significant adverse visual impact on this sensitive archaeological landscape must be assumed rather than discounted.

7. Impact on Cultural Landscape Integrity

Based on my professional engagement with the site, it is my considered opinion that the proposed development would result in a substantial and adverse impact on the integrity of the Lemanaghan cultural landscape.

The significance of the site lies not only in its physical remains, but in its coherence as a landscape defined by isolation, continuity, and a strong relationship between place and tradition. The introduction of large-scale turbines would disrupt this coherence and undermine the qualities that allow the site to be experienced and understood in its historical context.

Such an intervention would not merely alter views but would fundamentally change the way in which the site is perceived, interpreted, and valued. In this regard, the impact must be considered as affecting the cultural landscape as a whole, rather than individual elements within it.

8. Policy and Proper Planning Considerations

In assessing the proposed development, it is necessary to consider whether it constitutes proper planning and sustainable development, having regard to the sensitivity of the receiving environment.

Irish planning policy and legislation recognise the importance of protecting archaeological heritage and its setting. Best practice guidance also emphasises that the setting of a heritage site is a key component of its significance.

The proposed development would introduce visually dominant structures into a sensitive archaeological landscape, resulting in a significant and irreversible change to its character. It is considered that this impact has not been adequately justified, particularly in light of the likelihood that alternative sites exist which would not give rise to comparable adverse effects.

9. Tourism and Community Value

Heritage tourism plays an important role in Ireland's economy and in sustaining rural communities. Sites such as Lemanaghan attract visitors seeking authentic historical landscapes and cultural experiences.

The erosion of the site's visual integrity and sense of place would diminish its appeal as a heritage destination. This would have implications not only for tourism, but also for local identity and the continued engagement of the community with the site.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed wind farm development at Lemanaghan would have a significant adverse impact on a site of national archaeological importance and its associated cultural landscape.

The development would:

- Compromise the integrity of the site's setting
- Introduce dominant and intrusive visual elements

- Undermine the cultural and historical value of the landscape
- Detract from its role in heritage tourism and community life

While renewable energy development is supported in principle, this proposal represents an inappropriate siting of such infrastructure.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that the proposed development would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and that planning permission should be refused.

Yours sincerely,

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¹ Further historical information and documentation of Saint Manchan's Shrine and the Lemanaghan monastic site can be found at: <http://www.saint-manchans-shrine.com>

Saint Manchan's Shrine: Art and Devotion in 12th Century Ireland. Griffin Murray and Kevin O'Dwyer ISBN: 978-1-8383513-1-1

Stories from a Sacred Landscape. Caimin O'Brien ISBN:1-85635-489-X