

Formal Observation in Objection to Planning Application ACP-324165-26

May 2026

Formal Observation - An Coimisiún Pleanála

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

Planning Application Reference: ACP-324165-26 / Case No. 324165

Applicant: Maughanaclea Ltd / Enerco Energy Limited

Description of Development: 10-year planning permission for Maughanaclea Wind Farm consisting of 14 wind turbines, a 110kV substation and 110kV underground cabling connection and associated works

Location: Maughanaclea, County Cork

Submitted by: Dylan Owens, Ahil beg, Kealkill, Cork, P75K079
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Date: 24th May 2026

1. Introduction

I write as an individual resident to object to the above application and to ask An Coimisiún Pleanála to refuse permission for the proposed Maughanaclea Wind Farm.

I am a homeowner and have lived at Ahil beg, Kealkill since 2023, directly within the landscape that this proposal would transform. I work from home — as a filmmaker and as the founder of a social-impact technology venture — so my home is also my workplace; both adults in this household work from home. I ask the Commission to assess this submission on its own merits, as the account of one resident whose home, health, work and daily life would be directly and permanently affected by this development.

My objection rests on the following grounds, set out below: the loss of the quality of life and restorative environment that drew me to this valley; the visual impact of the proposed turbines on my daily walk; operational noise; the disruption of a multi-year construction phase; the unassessed risk to my private water supply; the loss of residential amenity; the loss of recreational amenity on a trail I use daily; the overstated necessity of this particular site; and my support for the wider environmental, heritage and planning grounds raised by my community, including the Mealagh Valley Dark Skies initiative.

For the reasons that follow, I respectfully ask the Commission to refuse permission.

2. Quality of Life, Wellbeing and the Restorative Value of This Place

This is the heart of my objection.

I moved to West Cork in 2023 to escape the stresses of city life, which I believe were contributing to a number of health difficulties at that time. In the years since, those difficulties

have eased or resolved, and I attribute that recovery directly to the environment I now live in — its quiet, its clean air, and the restorative experience of living surrounded by unspoilt nature.

For me this is not a sentimental attachment. It is the basis on which I chose to build both my home and my working life here. Daily walks on the hill above my home, and quiet time spent in nature, are central to how I maintain my health; I am a practitioner of Transcendental Meditation, and the forest and hillside close to my home — the forest lies about 1.5 km from my front door — are where I practise. The tranquillity, the dark night skies, the clean air and the sense of being immersed in nature rather than in industry are the qualities that make this place restorative, and they are the qualities this application would remove.

Fourteen turbines of 169 m, in continuous motion on the skyline, accompanied by aviation lighting through every night and by years of heavy construction, would industrialise the environment whose quiet and integrity are the reason I am well. And the daily walk itself — up past the forest and on to the open hillside — would be conducted in full view of the turbine line, as I explain in Section 3.

I want to be clear and careful about how I put this. I am not asking the Commission to accept a medical claim that wind turbines cause specific illnesses. I am telling the Commission, as a matter of my own direct experience, that the quality of life and the restorative environment of this valley are real; that they are the reason I came here and a reason I have remained well; and that this application would destroy them. The effects of a development on “population and human health” are a category that the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU) expressly requires to be assessed — they are the subject of the applicant's own EIAR Chapter 5 — and the wellbeing and quality of life of the people who live here is a material and serious planning consideration, not a peripheral one.

3. Visual Impact on My Daily Walk

The route I walk most days runs up the hill from my home, past the forest and on toward the open hillside. The proposed turbines would dominate that walk.

About a minute and a half up the road beyond the forest — the first point at which the view opens out — I analysed the sightlines toward the proposed wind farm, using the surveyed turbine positions and terrain elevation data and applying straightforward trigonometry. From that single point on my walk, all fourteen proposed turbines would be visible. None would be screened by intervening hills. The nearest would stand approximately 3.2 km away and the furthest approximately 6.7 km, and several would be seen at, or close to, their full tip height of 169 metres — well over twice the height of the Elysian building in Cork city.

I want to be precise about what I am, and am not, claiming. I am not asserting that the turbines would dominate the view from the windows of my house; my home sits lower and is more enclosed, and the wide view opens only further up the walk. What I am putting before the Commission is that the walk itself — which, as I explained above, is part of how I maintain my health — would from that point on be conducted in full and constant view of fourteen turbines strung across the ridge. The value of that walk lies in its tranquillity and its open, undeveloped horizon, and that value would be lost.

I would add that the applicant's own photomontages (EIAR Volume 2 — Photomontage Booklet) are taken from a selected set of viewpoints and, as residents here have observed,

show almost no dwellings, so the everyday experience of those of us who live and walk here is not well represented in the application. I would be glad to provide the Commission with the underlying sightline analysis on request.

4. Noise

The proposed turbines would introduce a continuous, mechanical noise source into a valley whose defining quality is its quiet.

I want to be measured about this. My home is set well back from the turbine site, up a remote laneway, and I am not claiming that I would be subjected to loud noise. But the background noise here is exceptionally low, particularly at night, and that matters: the intrusion caused by wind-farm noise is experienced as a change relative to the existing baseline, and a sound that would be unremarkable in a busier place can be clearly audible against the near-silence of this valley. Turbine noise — and in particular amplitude modulation, the pulsing character of it, which is recognised as more intrusive than steady noise of the same measured level — can also carry across open upland terrain, especially at night and downwind.

I cannot say with certainty what the noise level at my home would be — and that is precisely why I ask the Commission to examine the applicant's noise assessment (EIAR Chapter 12, Noise and Vibration, with its predicted noise levels and noise contour mapping), and to satisfy itself that the assessment robustly covers all affected dwellings, accounts honestly for the very low existing baseline of this valley, and properly addresses amplitude modulation and night-time noise. I also work from home as a filmmaker, for whom quiet is a working necessity and not merely a comfort. I would note, finally, that the applicant has submitted a “Protocol for Management of Complaints” (EIAR Appendix 12-7): the existence of a complaints procedure is itself an acknowledgement that this development is expected to generate noise about which residents will need to complain.

5. The Disruption of a Multi-Year Construction Phase

This is not a brief or minor construction project. Building fourteen turbines, a 110kV substation, a 30 m meteorological mast, four borrow pits, three construction compounds, new and upgraded access roads and extensive cable trenching is a major civil-engineering undertaking that would run for years.

My own home is reached by a remote laneway, and I do not expect construction traffic to pass my door. But the applicant's newspaper notice confirms that turbine components would be transported via the national road network and the R585 — locally, the Kealkill–Cousane road — with a new access road constructed off the R585, crossing the L8777 local road. Those are the roads on which my daily life depends: the roads I use to reach the village and everything beyond it, and the roads at the foot of the hill, around Carriganass Castle, where the walk I take most days begins. A multi-year programme of heavy-goods and abnormal-load traffic, rock blasting, ground vibration and dust along those roads would affect this whole community, and it would reach the very place my daily walk starts.

Because I work from home, I would also live alongside this disruption continuously, throughout the working day, for the full duration of the construction period. I ask the Commission to scrutinise the Construction Environmental Management Plan (EIAR Appendix 4-3) and the

Traffic Management Plan (EIAR Appendix 15-2) against the reality of a multi-year construction programme in a small rural community.

6. My Domestic Water Supply: A Private Well With No Baseline

My household depends entirely on a private well for all of its domestic water. We have no connection to a public mains supply and no alternative source.

To my knowledge, no survey has identified my well, and no baseline testing of my water quality has been carried out for the purposes of this application. Yet the construction of this development uphill of homes such as mine would involve deep excavation, rock blasting and the opening of borrow pits — all of which carry a real risk of disturbing groundwater, fracturing rock, and causing turbidity or contamination in private supplies.

The absence of baseline testing is not a minor matter. Without a documented record of my water quality before construction begins, I would have no way of demonstrating that any later deterioration was caused by the development — and therefore no practical protection and no recourse. I ask the Commission to require, as an absolute prerequisite to any consideration of consent, a full field survey of private wells in the affected area, baseline water-quality testing, and an independent, ongoing monitoring framework, and to satisfy itself that EIAR Chapter 9 (Hydrology and Hydrogeology) adequately identifies and protects private water supplies such as mine.

7. Loss of Residential Amenity

I want to be careful and honest about how I raise this. I understand that, in Irish planning, the effect of a development on the market value of a house is not, on its own, a strong or decisive consideration. What the Commission properly weighs is the loss of residential amenity — the noise, the visual impact, the loss of tranquillity described above — and evidence about property value is relevant only as an indicator of how serious that amenity loss is.

On that point, I note that the applicant's own evidence on this question is an appendix titled "Impact of Wind Turbines on House Prices in Scotland" (EIAR Appendix 5-2), a study dated 2016. A decade-old study of the Scottish housing market is a weak and indirect basis on which to judge the effect of this development on rural homes in West Cork; it does not engage with the particular character of this landscape, or with the homes and lives within it. I ask the Commission to treat the loss of residential amenity at homes such as mine as a real and substantial impact in its own right — grounded in the noise, visual and tranquillity effects set out above — and not to regard that question as disposed of by a single, dated study of another country's housing market.

8. Loss of Recreational Amenity: the Srón na Gaoithe Loop and the Sheep's Head Way

The trail along which I live is the Srón na Gaoithe loop walk — a name which, fittingly, means "the nose of the wind." It is a waymarked loop of roughly 9 km that climbs from Carriganass Castle in Kealkill into the hills above, and it forms part of the Sheep's Head Way, one of West Cork's signature long-distance walking routes. I walk on and around this route regularly; as I have explained, it is part of how I maintain my health.

The proposed turbines would industrialise both the skyline and the soundscape of this route. A walk whose value lies in its tranquillity, its sweeping views over Bantry Bay, and its sense of wild upland landscape would instead be conducted beneath fourteen turbines of 169 metres.

I understand, too, that the applicant's own assessment of the project's effect on the Sheep's Head Way is internally inconsistent — a point examined in detail in other submissions on this application. I ask the Commission to weigh that inconsistency, and to give proper weight to the loss of a recreational amenity that is genuinely used, and valued, by residents and visitors alike.

9. The Necessity of This Particular Site Is Overstated

I do not object to renewable energy in principle. I object to the proposition that this particular site — a sensitive and legally constrained upland — must be sacrificed in order to meet national climate targets. That necessity argument is weaker than it first appears.

Ireland already generates more renewable electricity than its grid and storage can absorb. EirGrid's Annual Renewable Energy Constraint and Curtailment Report for 2024 records that 12.1% of all the renewable electricity generated on the island of Ireland that year was “dispatched down” — constrained or curtailed off the system — because the grid could not use it. Where a substantial share of renewable generation is already being switched off for want of grid capacity and storage, the argument that the climate is served specifically by industrialising this upland does not hold. The environmental harm of this development is certain, immediate and permanent; the climate benefit attributed to it is neither.

10. Support for the Wider Grounds, Including the Mealagh Valley Dark Skies Initiative

I have read the detailed environmental, hydrological, ecological, heritage and planning grounds raised by others in my community, and I support them and adopt them as part of my objection. In my own words, and from my own standpoint as a resident, I would emphasise the following.

The applicant's EIAR contains internal contradictions on core issues — including, as other submissions set out in detail, in its own treatment of the Sheep's Head Way — and an assessment that disagrees with itself cannot give the Commission a safe basis for granting consent. The development sits on the headwaters of rare, legally protected High Status rivers, where European law forbids any deterioration in water quality. The Mealagh Valley and the Maughanaclea hills hold one of the densest concentrations of prehistoric monuments in rural Ireland, including the Kealkill Stone Circle, which is protected by a statutory Preservation Order. Building heavy infrastructure on sloped upland blanket bog carries a genuine risk of peat failure, as has occurred elsewhere in Ireland.

Protected species, including the hen harrier and several bat species, are protected wherever they occur, and the survey evidence in this application is incomplete. I would add one first-hand observation of my own: red squirrels — a native species protected under the Wildlife Acts — are among the wildlife I see regularly in the woodland near my home, the kind of everyday local presence that desk-based survey work can overlook. And the site carries a High Landscape Value and High Sensitivity designation in the Cork County Development Plan, where wind energy is only “Open to Consideration” — a status that places the burden of proof firmly on the

applicant, a burden it has not discharged.

I want to draw the Commission's particular attention to the Mealagh Valley Dark Skies initiative. The Mealagh Valley community is actively pursuing Dark Sky Community accreditation, which would be the first of its kind in Ireland. A formal committee has been established and the application is at an advanced stage, with engagement from DarkSky International, practical guidance from Ireland's existing Mayo Dark Sky Park, engagement with Cork County Council on lighting policy, and a formal letter of support from Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan TD, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity. The proposed development would require continuous, high-intensity red aviation warning lights operating throughout the night, which would directly undermine this initiative and the near-pristine dark skies on which it depends. For me this is not an abstract concern. The dark, quiet night sky of this valley is part of the very environment I described at the start of this submission as restorative to my health. To permit this development would be to extinguish, with aviation lighting, the very asset that my community is working to have formally recognised and protected.

11. Conclusion and Request for an Oral Hearing

For the reasons set out above — the loss of a restorative environment that is the basis of my health and of my decision to live here; the visual impact of the turbines on my daily walk; operational noise; the disruption of a multi-year construction phase; the unassessed risk to my private water supply; the loss of residential and recreational amenity; and the wider environmental, heritage and planning grounds I have adopted — I respectfully ask An Coimisiún Pleanála to refuse permission for this application.

I also support the holding of an oral hearing into this application. The applicant's newspaper notice confirms that the Commission may, at its discretion, hold one. Given the number of serious and contested issues this application raises, and the number of residents whose homes and lives would be directly affected, I believe these matters should be tested in person rather than determined on documents alone, and I add my voice to the request that an oral hearing be held.

Signed: Dylan Owens

Date: 24th May 2026

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