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SID Planning

An Coimisiun Pleanála

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AN COIMISIUN PLEANÁLA	
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Planning Application Reference No: ACP-324165-26

Applicant: Maughanaclea Ltd/Enerco

Description of Development: 10 year planning permission for Maughanaclea Wind Farm consisting of 14 no. wind turbines, a 110kV substation and 110kV underground cabling connection and associated work

Location: Maughanaclea, Co Cork

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to formally object to the proposed windfarm above on the following basis and I strongly urge the Inspector to investigate the following observations.

1. VISUAL IMPACT

The developers are working from the 2006 guidelines as these have not been updated and are widely considered to be outdated. In 2006 the turbines were much smaller. With each planned turbine being 169m high they would be highly

visible in the area, including from the R585 scenic route, and particularly at night with the shining red lights on top which would absolutely ruin our Dark Skies - which we are so protective of that we have applied for Dark Sky Community recognition. The developer admits that certain turbines will comprise 44% of all landscape views – this is far from having ‘*no significant cumulative visual effect*’ as they write in their application.

The Cork County Development plan describes the area as a High Value Landscape which is highly sensitive to certain types of change. In my opinion 14 turbines at 169m high would definitely be a type of change which would have a huge negative impact on the landscape.

In the EIAR Section 13.3.3.1 RSA Summary and Visibility Appraisal the photos used as examples of partial/intermittent visual screening and full/dense visual screening both show deciduous trees and bushes in summertime. The planner has omitted to show the same view in winter time when there are no leaves and therefore there would be little/no visual screening. The planner is also intending to pull up some of the hedgerows which would affect the screening.

In the EIAR Section 13.2.5 LVIA Wind Energy Context it is stated ‘*Over time, wind turbines have, and will become, a more familiar and accepted component of the Irish landscape...Accordingly their presence may not carry the same level of perceived visual intrusion as less common or incongruous forms of development*’. This is ridiculous – it is like saying that if they started to build skyscrapers in the area we wouldn’t notice them after a while as we would become used to them. These monstrous wind turbines will never be anything but incongruous in this rural area. I also refute that windfarms will become more familiar and accepted as Micheal Martin is already looking at nuclear options for electricity production as it becomes obvious that Ireland is wasting most of the wind energy produced due to a lack of storage capability.

2. WATER

Most if not all residents in the area rely on well water – if and when the water becomes polluted who will be liable for this and what action will be taken to remedy it? Will any independent company have responsibility for annual testing of our water supply? No survey appears to have been carried out by Enerco to determine the number of private wells in the area and where they are situated.

There is nothing in the planning about the required risk assessment that should be carried out on our water supply in line with the Drinking Water Regulations (2023).

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Department of Environment, Version 1.1 What Impact can a Wind Farm have on Ground Water? published the following in 2015 '*Changes to the local water environment can affect receptors such as wells/boreholes, springs, wetlands and waterways, and can also have implications for groundwater-dependent ecology and/or land stability*'.

Our home Hagal Farm lies directly at the base of the Maughanaclea hills. We already have an enormous problem with flood waters from the hills and fields draining straight down our lane (which has been washed away in parts 3 times over the past 2 years resulting in huge repair costs for us and our 3 neighbours who have right of way). With the weather becoming wetter and wetter we anticipate this problem to continue to worsen and now we have the added worry of contaminated water from the construction, running and decommissioning of the wind farm going into our well along with the floodwaters. I therefore ask that our well is tested before works commence and that our well water is monitored on an annual basis at a minimum by an independent company.

The planning application makes no reference to microplastic shedding from turbine blades, known as Leading Edge Erosion. This damage occurs after only a few years. The particles eroded from blades include epoxy which is 40%BPA, a frequently banned endocrine disruptor and neurotoxin. This BPA will end up in our water supply and the air as well as in the animals which graze in the area.

3. SHADOW FLICKER

5.2.3.5 states '*Where shadow flicker is predicted to occur at a specific location this does not imply that it will be witnessed. Potential occupants of a property may be sleeping or occupying a room on another side of the property ...or completely absent from the location during the time of the shadow flicker...the shadow flicker may not be witnessed if curtains or blinds in the bedroom are closed*'. These are absolutely ridiculous statements. All residents have a right to the peaceful enjoyment of their property and should not have to go out/move from room to room/close curtains in order to protect their health from the negative effects of shadow flicker. I have a history of migraine headaches and I am worried about the impact this will have on me.

4. NO MEANINGFUL CO2 REDUCTION

Manufacturing, transport, concrete and destruction and removal of forestry and soil will all contribute to CO2. The carbon account ignores the full lifecycle emissions: peat oxidation, concrete and steel foundations, grid infrastructure and the unresolved problem of turbine decommissioning and blade waste. These impacts must be considered as part of the overall balance (see Future

Responsibility below). Researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University warned that wind farms on peatlands can become net carbon emitters, not climate solutions. Their findings are clear: once disturbed, peat starts to release its stored carbon, undoing the very benefits that these turbines claim to deliver. Peatland is one of the world's most important natural carbon stores. When it's dug up, drained or built on, the carbon locked away for thousands of years is released into the atmosphere. Since 1987 Ireland has supposedly been committed to the protection of its wetlands and peatlands yet at the same time it is allowing them to be dug up and filled with concrete.

5. IRELANDS RENEWABLE ENERGY STRATEGY

According to the developer, this windfarm will assist Ireland to meet its renewable energy targets and the findings of the SEAI surveys from 2003, 2017 and 2023 show that 45% of people surveyed cited environmental and cost benefits. Were the people surveyed told that they will not see a reduction in electricity costs – in fact these costs will continue to increase – and given a true picture of the negative effects on the environment? Instead it is only data centres which will benefit because Ireland has committed to building more and more.

Emphasis should be on ocean wave energy, geothermal and nuclear – if these were to be implemented and no further data centres built Ireland would have a better chance of meeting 2030 targets.

6. NOISE

The natural shape of the valley means noise travels far and echoes from one side to the other. Works will involve rock breaking machinery and this noise should not be sucked up into an average measurement as it gives a false picture. Once in operation the turbine noise is again based on 2006 guidelines when the blades were much smaller. The developer is completely ignoring the infrasonic frequency that they generate. Cork County Council's Draft Noise Action Plan 2024-2028 states '*Cork County Council shall consider measures to ensure the environmental noise quality in Quiet Areas in open country are preserved, with careful management of activities that would impact the acoustic environment*'. As I sit writing this objection the only sound I can hear is that of birdsong and the occasional sheep – this is something we have become very used to, and whenever we have been away on holiday and return the first thing we do on leaving the car is to stop and appreciate the silence.

7. WILDLIFE

The EU's Nature Restoration Law which was supported by 11 of Ireland's 13 MEP's in 2024 legally requires member states to restore ecosystems by 2050, to protect farmland birds and promote wilderness preservation. The developers are basing their evidence on the biodiversity of the area simply by checking the NBDC to identify protected species in the area. Obviously the NBDC relies on the public to record any sightings on its database and if this has not been done in the recent past then any records will not be reliable. They seem to be relying heavily on their 'desktop assessments'.

8. TOURISM & UNSUITABILITY FOR THE AREA

The Mealagh Valley is a beautiful, peaceful location which has attracted people of many different nationalities to buy, build or renovate homes here. In Appendix 5-3 6.17 it states that there are 11 Airbnb premises within the study area but that they are effectively being ignored due to the new Short Term Letting bill. They are not taking into account that the policy has been amended for towns with a population less than 20,000. We run an Airbnb which we will be able to continue to run as such, as the property is our only home and we stay on the property when we have guests. We should therefore be considered as tourist accommodation in the report. We have not been approached by Enerco with regards to this even though they are aware of our business. We have over 1,000 guests currently booked in for this year (we sleep 16) which is a substantial amount of tourists visiting the area. Our guests in the main come to get away from noisy town life – most of them comment in their reviews that they loved the peace and quiet and the starry skies. I don't imagine our property will be so attractive when in the shadow of massive wind turbines and with the starry skies being spoilt by these turbines being lit up all night. It is highly possible that this will result in a decline in guests (our only income).

Section 2.14.7 (e) of the Cork County Development Plan 2022 for the West Cork area states it should '*Recognise the need to encourage the diversification of the rural economy by promoting a stronger tourism and leisure economy through the protection of the area's natural and built heritage*'.

The Sheeps Head Way walking route runs right through the valley, as does the St Finbarrs Way pilgrimage walk. Both walks attract numerous tourists to the area.

The Mealagh Valley is exceedingly rich in heritage sites as published in David Myler's book 'An Archaeological Survey of the Mealagh Valley'. These sites should be protected and preserved. Any road widening and the use of large vehicles to transport massively heavy parts and equipment is bound to cause structural damage to these historically important monuments.

Cork County is being inundated with windfarm applications - far more than any other counties. If you ask foreigners to name 2 Irish counties they will usually respond with Cork and Kerry – these are the 2 hotspot counties for visitors who come for the scenery – will they still want to visit when all they can see is massive wind turbines instead of beautiful rolling hills and green fields? The cumulative impact of so many windfarms will totally change the area from rural scenic landscape to industrial area.

A very sad outcome of this planning application and others which are being put forward is the effect that this has had on the local community. It is fracturing relationships with neighbours and causing a lot of stress. The amount of time we are having to spend reading through plans and past planning applications and formulating objections is very stressful when most of us have busy working lives. It is already affecting many residents' sleep and general health because of the worry hanging over us all.

We have an amazing community in the Mealagh Valley and as such we came together to conduct a survey in 2024 of every house in the valley to find out what residents liked/disliked about the area and what future changes they would like to see made. The overwhelming majority of residents stated that the best thing about living in the valley was its access to nature and the friendliness. Both of these things are now being tested because of one windfarm application on top of another. The Mealagh Valley also received a Heritage Grant in 2024 and now has an active Heritage Committee dedicated to capturing the spirit of the area and to preserve its history for future generations. The Heritage Keepers group is so successful that it won the Inclusive Event award in 2025 for its 'Voices of the Valley' documentary, bringing our little valley into the spotlight and acting as an encouragement for future tourism to the area.

9. PROPERTY VALUES

A University of Galway study in 2023 'Wind Turbines & House Prices Along the West of Ireland' found that house prices decreased by over 14% in an area close to a windfarm, and this percentage increases with the height of the turbines. We know for definite that 1 house which is currently on the market has had interested parties back out when they have learnt about the windfarm proposal. We will not be able to stay in our current home for many more years as we will need to downsize soon due to age. We have ploughed all our investments into the property to improve and maintain it and we cannot afford to sell it at a loss. This is a huge concern for us at present and it is having an impact on our current day to day life – we need to continue to have works done but are having to put

them off as we don't know whether it's worth it if we then can't sell the house or get what it's worth. Even one of our local estate agents has confirmed in writing that houses currently on the market are not selling due to uncertainty and concerns about the planned windfarms nearby.

FUTURE RESPONSIBILITY

The decommissioning schedule in 6.1 is woefully scant on details. An Coimisiun Pleanála follows the Wind Europe guidelines which state that a deconstruction guarantee must be deposited with the permitting authority at time of approval. Has this been done as it is not mentioned in the planning documents. WindEurope also admits that it is generally not possible to remove all of the operating fluids without leaving any residue, and that *'Removing the foundations is both an environmental and economical challenge, as it is not proven that removing the whole foundation is environmentally friendly'*. Furthermore, in 5.4.4 of WindEurope's Decommissioning of Onshore Wind Turbines it is stated that *'Composite materials can also be recycled or recovered through mechanical grinding, thermo, thermo-chemical or electro-mechanical processes but not all of them are available on an industrial scale.'* I very much doubt that Ireland has the capability for this therefore all parts will need shipping overseas which should be included in the carbon footprint.

I am aware of other windfarm turbine bases in the local area where planning was refused almost a decade ago yet these concrete bases are still there scarring the landscape with no attempt to try to rewild the area. Also telegraph poles which have been left up despite regular chasing to get them removed. Who will be responsible for ensuring that decommissioning takes place within the allowed time and to the proper standard? Who will monitor our well water supplies to check if it is safe to drink and who will be responsible if it is not safe?

Yours faithfully



Sarah Barkans

Att: €50 cash fee