

AN COIMISIÚN PLEANÁLA
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Joe O'Connor
 Riverview,
 Sharavogue,
 Birr,
 Co. Offaly,
 R42 F228

Herd Number: S1750808

30 June 2026

Case Reference: PAX92.324279 — Proposed Ballincor Wind Farm, Counties Offaly and Tipperary

Receptor number on RWE map: 17

To An Coimisiún Pleanála,

My name is Joe O'Connor. I live at Riverview, Sharavogue, Birr, Co. Offaly, and I farm here. I have been farming this land since 1994 and I have lived in this house since 2000. I keep a herd of pedigree Hereford cattle (herd number S1750808). My farmyard and dwelling are on the Sharavogue side of the Little Brosna river, approximately 300 metres from the river. I wish to object to the proposed Ballincor Wind Farm on four grounds:

- Traffic on the R492 and damage to Sharavogue Bridge.
- Risk of TB to my pedigree Hereford herd through badger disturbance, and changes to the floodplain.
- Impact on the swans, wild geese, wild duck and other birds whose flight path runs along the Little Brosna, and on the wider barn owl population of this area.
- Shadow flicker and noise from the proposed turbines — and a noise monitor that was placed on my own land and whose results were never given back to me.

I deal with each of these below.

1. The R492 and Sharavogue Bridge

My dwelling house is to the north of my farmyard. Both have separate entrances about 30 metres apart, on the R492. I walk that stretch of road on average ten times every day — first thing in the morning, during the day, in the evening, and last thing before dark. In the winter months I walk it after dark to carry out farm chores and check on my livestock. There is no other way to do the work.

The R492 is already a very busy road. It carries the traffic between the N62 and Shinrone, Moneygall, and on towards Roscrea. Lorries, large agricultural machinery and buses use it every day. The road is narrow, and when two of these vehicles meet, one has to pull up or pull in to let the other pass. People regularly use farmyard entrances as pull-in points. The white line runs almost the full length of it because there is no width to overtake safely.

To add thousands of lorry journeys carrying gravel, concrete, fill and turbine components to that road, for two to three years, would be completely irresponsible and would create a serious safety hazard for anyone living or working along it. The developer's own transport assessment describes this same road as "relatively narrow, with limited hard shoulders and several bends," and at the same time concludes that the residual impact of the construction traffic will be "imperceptible" and "not significant." I do not accept that. The two descriptions cannot both be true, and the first one is the one I see every day from my own gate.

The proposed site entrance is on a bad bend, just past a humpback bridge over the old railway line and within a short distance of Sharavogue Bridge over the river. The road goes into a deep dip on the Sharavogue side before the humpback bridge, so a driver coming from that direction cannot see the proposed entrance until they are practically on top of it. There have been numerous accidents at this location already, before any wind farm traffic. I cannot understand how this point on the road has been put forward as a safe entrance for HGVs and abnormal load deliveries.

Sharavogue Bridge itself was built in 1850 and is listed in the Offaly Record of Protected Structures. It was not built to carry the axle loads or the volume of HGV traffic that this development will require over a two to three year construction phase, and certainly not the abnormal indivisible loads that will carry the turbine components. There is no independent structural survey of the bridge in the application. I have a real fear that the bridge will be damaged and once a structure like that is damaged it cannot simply be put back.

There is also the cumulative point. The Shannon – Dublin water pipeline is proposed to cross the R492 about 250 metres from the wind farm site entrance, and its construction compound is planned on the Roscrea side of Sharavogue Cross. If both projects proceed at the same time, or even overlap, our local road becomes a construction-traffic-only road. None of the landowners benefiting from this wind farm live on the R492, and none of them will have to use it on a daily basis. The burden falls entirely on the people who do.

2. The risk of TB to my Hereford herd, and the floodplain

I have been farming a pedigree Hereford herd here since 1994. Anybody who has spent time in farming knows what the risk of a TB outbreak means: animals lost, restrictions on movement, the financial damage of a closed herd, and the psychological strain that goes with all of that. It is not a small concern. It is at the centre of how I plan, work and live.

The Department of Agriculture's own published research has consistently shown that disturbance of the badger population is a known driver of the spread of TB in cattle. When badgers are forced to move from established setts and territories, by heavy construction machinery, excavation, ground clearance and new access roads, they range further, encounter new groups, and the disease moves with them. This is well documented.

The proposed development site, the access track corridor along the river, and the road works between Sharavogue Bridge and Fadden cut directly through ground that supports an active badger population. I have observed setts and runs in this area myself over the years. The applicant's own ecology chapter records active badger setts across the development site.

Once that ground is opened up, machinery brought in, hedgerows broken and drains crossed, those animals will move and there is no mechanism in the application to prevent the disease consequences that follow.

If my herd were to go down with a reactor as a consequence of disturbance arising from this development, I would have no realistic means of proving cause, no compensation route from the developer, and no way back from the financial and stock losses involved. The application contains no consideration of TB transmission risk to neighbouring herds, no engagement with the well-established badger-cattle link, and no mitigation directed at it. "Not significant" is not an answer to a herdowner whose livelihood depends on remaining clear.

Closely related to this is the question of the floodplain. The proposed access road from Sharavogue Bridge will run along the Little Brosna corridor, in places within 20 metres of the river. The whole length of this corridor floods every winter. The access tracks along the river corridor will be fully submerged for 4-5 months every year. There is no doubt.

You cannot drive hundreds of metres of compacted hard-surface access track across an active floodplain, with concrete bases for turbines on top of it, and not change the flood behaviour of the river. Water finds its own level. Compress one side of the floodplain and the water that used to spread there has to go somewhere and that somewhere is the other side of the river, which is where my land sits. The notion that the water on the development side will have no connection to the water table on my side is nonsense.

3. The birds of the Little Brosna and the wider hinterland

Since I started farming here in 1994 the Little Brosna has been used as a flightpath by swans, wild geese and wild duck. I see these birds on the river and over the callows on a regular basis. They come in to land on the callow on the Sharavogue side and they fly the river corridor up and down between the Brosna Callows SPA and the surrounding feeding grounds. They do not stay in tidy boxes drawn on a map. They use the river itself as the route.

A line of eleven turbines, 185 metres to blade tip, placed in a near-straight line along that river will sit directly across that flightpath. The Applicant's document entirely understates the amount of birds who visit the area and the risk the turbines present. From my own observation, I can say only that the birds I see every week of the year will be flying directly into the rotor sweep zone.

There is one further point I want to put on the record. I am secretary of Ettagh Graveyard, which is approximately 7 kilometres from the proposed wind farm site. Last year I was at the graveyard one morning and I happened to meet a representative from Tobin Engineering, who was working for the developer. He was checking the old Protestant Church beside the graveyard for owls. As I had a key I showed him the owl box that had been donated by a parishioner specifically for the church owls to nest in. He recorded it. That record is nowhere in the Application.

I include this because it tells you something important. If the developer's own ecologists are out checking owl nest boxes 7 kilometres from the site, the hinterland this wind farm potentially

affects is far larger than the small assessment study area drawn on the maps. Barn owls fly long distances at night between nest and feeding ground. The Ballincor area is, on the developer's own evidence and on BirdWatch Ireland's, the densest barn owl breeding area in the country, and the entire Irish population sits at only 562 to 702 breeding pairs. Despite this, no dedicated nocturnal barn owl survey was carried out by the developer. Not once over six years. They surveyed during the day, for a bird that is active at night, and then concluded there was no collision risk because they had no flight data.

4. Shadow flicker, noise, and a monitor whose results I never got back

There are already wind turbines around Birr. When I travel at night I can see the red aviation lights on top of those turbines flashing across the landscape from a long way off, and I can hear the gush of the blades when the wind is up. Those turbines are smaller than the ones proposed at Ballincor and they are further away from me than these new ones will be. If I can already see the existing ones, the new ones, larger and closer, will be more again — not less.

My house, identified by the developer as Receptor 17, is one of the closest residences to the proposed development. The nearest turbine, T11, would sit approximately one kilometre from my home. The developer's own modelling — produced in WindPRO and lodged as Appendix 16-1 to the application records that my property will experience shadow flicker on 182 days of the year, with a worst-case annual total of just under 84 hours. Chapter 16 of the EIAR, the chapter the Board would normally read, presents only 85 of those days, the days where flicker exceeds 30 minutes. The other 97 days on which my house will experience flicker but for less than 30 minutes per day do not appear in the chapter at all. The developer's own software produced this figure. The developer chose not to present it.

I want to be clear about what this means in plain language. From October through March, on every reasonably clear day, the sun moving behind the rotor of T11 and the other turbines in line with it will cast a rotating shadow across this house. For more than half the year, on a majority of days, this will be part of daily life. The 30-minute threshold and the shutdown system the developer relies on do not protect me from the 97 days that fall under that threshold. Those 97 days are simply lived with. They will not be mitigated.

Noise is the second part of the same issue. In around 2023 I was approached at my home by a representative of RWE, Paul Darcy, who asked me to allow a noise monitor to be placed on my holding as part of the developer's background noise survey. I agreed. The monitor was placed on my land and left there for somewhere between six weeks and two months. To this day I have not been given the results of what was recorded on my own land. I made my property available, in good faith, to inform an assessment that is now being used against me, and I have never seen the data.

I do not know whether the readings from my monitor were used in the noise chapter or not. I do not know whether my location was excluded as too quiet, too noisy, or for some other reason. The independent review of the noise assessment submitted by the community group to the Board has identified that the developer's noise monitoring conducted between July and September 2022 was taken during the season of lowest wind speeds in Ireland.

If a developer takes a noise monitor onto a man's land and uses what is recorded there in a planning application, the man whose land it is should be sent the readings. That did not happen. I raise it not as a side issue but as a measure of the kind of consultation that has been carried out for this application.

Closing

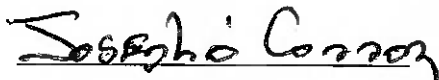
The developer has reviewed all of the concerns above and a great many more raised by my neighbours and by the wider community. They have written long reports about each one, identified the problem each one carries, and then concluded that the residual impact in every case is "not significant."

What is actually being said, in plain language, is that the concerns of the people who will live with this development are not significant. That includes the road I walk ten times a day, the bridge that brings me to and from my own livestock, the herd I have built since 1994, the floodplain my grazing depends on, the swans and geese I have watched on the Brosna for thirty years, and the shadow that will sweep across my home on the majority of days of the year. These issues have not been adequately or accurately addressed in RWE's application.

On that basis and for each of the issues raised above, I respectfully ask An Coimisiún Pleanála to refuse this planning application.

I thank the Board for taking the time to read my objection.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Joe O'Connor', written in a cursive style.

Joe O'Connor

Herd Number: S1750808