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R42PV30

Objection to the Proposed Ballincor Wind Farm (11 Turbines and Associated Infrastructure) Ref: ACP SID PAX92.324279

I live at Ballyegan, within 1.5km of the proposed development site. My family has farmed this land for 48 years. Our farm runs from our home all the way to the river and along it for a mile, a stretch of river that the applicant is now claiming as the boundary of their wind farm site.

I am not writing as a casual observer. I am writing as someone who has spent a lifetime in this landscape, who knows every field, every bend of the river, every season of the bog and the callows. I know where the otters live because I watch them. I know where the swans nest because I see them year after year. I know how the river floods because I have farmed alongside it for forty winters.

I am also writing as one of the private citizens who, in the late 1980s, worked hard with our own money and at our own risk to protect Sharavogue Raised Bog at a time when no government apparatus existed to do so. That work led directly to its designation as a Special Area of Conservation. Experts have described it as among the best examples of raised bog in the country. The clear understanding at the time was that the SAC designation would secure this site against future threat.

Forty years on, I find myself fighting the same fight, against a new threat, and in a planning system that appears unable to give the bog the protection its designation was meant to guarantee. That is the context in which this objection is made.

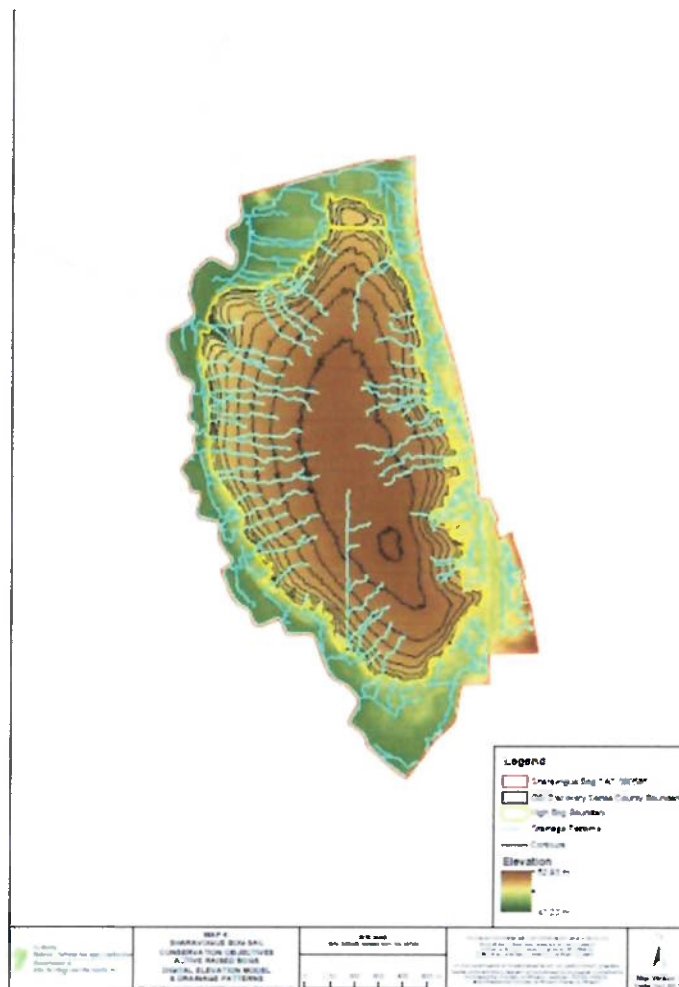
The development boundary effectively meets a European protected site

The Sharavogue Raised Bog is a Special Area of Conservation. The boundary of the proposed development comes extremely close to it — the SAC effectively forms part of the applicant's own land boundary. No reasonable planning authority should be entertaining heavy industrial construction, deep excavation, access tracks and 11

turbines immediately adjacent to a site of European conservation importance. The proximity alone should be disqualifying.

The claim of "no hydrological connectivity" is not credible

Any suggestion that the wind farm site, the river and the raised bog are not hydrologically connected is, to put it plainly, a farce. The NPWS groundwater vulnerability mapping for this area shows the fissured nature of the underlying ground. Water moves. It does not respect the lines drawn on a developer's site plan.



A raised bog lives or dies by its water. The Sharavogue bog is in active restoration — it is thriving, but it is fragile. A drop of even 1cm in the water table would be devastating. Excavation, dewatering, the laying of access tracks and turbine foundations and the long-term alteration of surface and groundwater flows that go with them, cannot honestly be claimed to be neutral in their effect on the bog. To accept such a claim would be to accept that 40 years of restoration effort can be set aside on the basis of a hydrology report written to support a planning application.

Flooding

I have farmed land along this river for over 40 years. We expect flooding as a matter of course, typically from November to late March, and increasingly in summer too. In recent years the floods have got worse, not better.

Placing four turbines and associated access tracks in the flood zone, in such close proximity to the river and to an SAC is, frankly, baffling. Construction in a flood zone will aggravate the flooding upstream and downstream of the site. Aggravated flooding will mean pollution carried into the river — silt, fuel, concrete leachate, and whatever else is mobilised by excavation and inundation. It will also mean we are unable to farm parts of our land for longer periods of the year.

I would ask the planning authority to take that as the lived testimony of someone who has watched these floods for four decades, not as speculation.

Protected and sensitive wildlife — on the very boundary the applicant has drawn

The stretch of river the applicant has chosen as their site boundary is home to a resident family of otters. We see them year-round and have done so for as long as I can remember. This is not occasional presence; it is a settled population. The wider area is renowned for otters. The noise, vibration, lighting and disturbance from construction and excavation will be profoundly damaging to them.

Swans nest in the banks of the same river — the banks the applicant is treating as a project boundary. Swans need solitude. They will not tolerate sustained construction activity beside them.

From my farm I can see directly across at the area that is to become the wind farm site itself. In winter that area is frequently home to hundreds and hundreds of swans. This is a wintering ground. An industrial wind farm development on that exact site will displace them.

The County Council has already deemed this site unsuitable

The democratically elected local authority for this area has, through its development plan determined that this site is not suitable for wind farm development. That determination was not arbitrary. It reflects local knowledge, local policy, and a democratic process.

If that determination can be set aside at the behest of a wind development company, the question must be asked: what is the purpose of having a local planning authority and an elected county council at all? The integrity of the planning system depends on

local policy meaning something. Approving this development would tell every community in the country that their council's policy direction can be overridden whenever a commercial applicant pushes hard enough.

Cumulative landscape impact

From our farm we already see Knockshegowna. We will, once built, see Carrig. We will see all 11 of the the proposed turbines in Ballincor. From other aspects of the farm, Derrinlough and Cush are already in view. This valley is being closed in by turbines from every direction.

Each application is assessed as if it were the only one. It is not. The cumulative effect on this landscape — and on the people who live in it and look at it every day — is severe and is being ignored.

Traffic and road safety on the N62

Access from our home and farm is directly onto the N62. That road has become very busy in recent years. We already experience long wait times simply to enter it safely. The construction traffic associated with 11 turbines, foundations, access tracks, substations and grid connection works will turn an already difficult road into a dangerous one and will do so for an extended period.

What this decision says about how we value our environment

To place a wind farm immediately beside an SAC sends a clear signal: that the most carefully protected places we have are now considered viable commercial opportunities. That the push for renewables is permitted to override every other consideration, including the protections we put in place precisely to prevent this kind of incursion.

I do not object to renewable energy. I object to renewable energy in the wrong place. There is no version of this project that does not impose irreversible damage on a unique and fragile habitat that took private citizens decades, and their own money, to save. Once the bog is hydrologically compromised, it cannot be uncompromised. Once the otters and swans are displaced, they do not return on schedule when construction ends. Once the landscape is industrialised, it is industrialised.

Conclusion

Forty years ago I took on a duty of care to this place in the hope that future generations could know it as I have known it. I took that duty seriously then and I take it seriously now. There is a great deal at stake here — a European designated habitat, a working river, a wintering ground, a farming community, a flood-prone valley, and a local planning policy that has already spoken.

I respectfully but firmly request that planning permission for the proposed Ballincor Wind Farm be refused.

Yours sincerely,

Maeve Drennan-Egan