

Shane and Mary Hctor

Rathbeg
Sharavogue
Birr
Co. Offaly
R42 F799

An Coimisiún Pleanála
32 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

10 June 2026

**Re: Objection — Planning Application PAX 92.324279 — Ballincor Wind Farm,
County Tipperary/Offaly**

Dear Inspector,

My name is Shane Hctor and I am writing jointly with my wife Mary. We began building our home at Rathbeg twenty-one years ago, and we invested approximately ninety percent of our own labour into that work, with invaluable help from family and neighbours. We have lived here for nineteen years, and we built this house with the intention of staying here for the rest of our lives.

This home represents far more than a physical structure to us, and I think it is important that the Inspector understands that before reading the grounds of our objection. Prior to the birth of our daughter, Mary and I endured an eleven-year struggle to become parents. We went through three unsuccessful IVF attempts and a lengthy adoption process. During some of the most difficult and emotional periods of our lives, the work we were doing on this house gave us a focus and a reason to keep going. At times, it was the only thing that helped. These years were hard in ways that are difficult to put into words, and this home became something much deeper than four walls. It became a source of stability and comfort, a place of quietness and safety, built stone by stone through some of the darkest times we faced together.

After eleven long years, we were finally blessed with the birth of our beautiful daughter, Heidi. Watching her grow up and flourish here, seeing her enjoy the freedom of our garden and the surrounding countryside, has brought us a joy we had almost stopped believing we would have. We have spent years walking with her through the meadows, down to the bog, along the banks of the River Brosna. Heidi has grown up here with the same love of it. She knows the birds by sight and the bog by feel. These are the memories that our family is built from, and they are bound up completely with this place and this landscape.

When the opportunity arose to purchase the field opposite our home, we took it without hesitation. We put our savings into that land in the belief that it would be part of a lasting legacy for Heidi and in time for her own family, that future generations would have the same chance to grow up with this countryside around them and develop the same deep connection to this place that we have. It is therefore with great concern that we now feel this vision may be compromised.

Not only did we build our home in Rathbeg, we also built our livelihoods here. Shane again built with his own hands my professional hair salon from the ground up. We take great pride in the bridal parties that come through our door. On so many occasions they have requested to use our gardens and the picturesque backdrop, bringing their professional photographers on the day. From the very beginning, clients have remarked on the peaceful tranquility that Rathbeg has to offer. They adored the quietness of the salon compared to the hustle and bustle of busier areas. That peace, that setting, that view, is not a background detail. It is part of what the salon is. We are genuinely concerned that this wind farm will have a detrimental impact on our livelihood as well as our home.

Standing at our kitchen window now, we can already see the eight Knockshigowna turbines up on the hill right in front of us, 4.1 kilometres away. On a clear day we can also see five turbines at the Silvermines in Tipperary, seven at Monahincha beside Roscrea to the east, and the cluster at Derrybrien in Galway. We are nearly surrounded as it is. All eleven of the proposed Ballincor turbines will be visible from our home. In fact all eleven will be visible through one window in our kitchen, and from every other window at the back of the house. That kitchen window, the sliding one we put in during last year's renovation to make the most of the view across the bog, will look out at eleven turbines if this application is granted.

This brings me to RWE's Visual Impact Chapter and their photo montages. Photograph 1 below is one of the images used to show the visual impact in our townland, Rathbeg. A planning inspector looking at that photograph would see a small, insignificant impact. What they would mostly see is a red bin, with a tiny sliver of a blade just about visible on the far left through a gap in the trees. The viewpoint has been positioned hard up against a high hedge so that the view is almost entirely blocked. This is not an accurate representation of what the visual impact of this development will be from where we live.



Photograph 1: Viewpoint Ref VP 23b (From application). The nearest turbine is 1.9 km from this point.

Photograph 2 below is the close-up montage from the same application, showing what the turbines will look like from this area. What I want the Inspector to know, and what I raised at the Drop-in Clinic at the County Arms without receiving any response, is that our house is missing from this photograph. Our house has stood here for twenty years. It should be clearly visible in this image. It is not there.



Photograph 2: Viewpoint Ref VP 23a (From application). Our house should be visible in this image. It is not.

As active members of Greater Birr Wind Action Group, we have invested in our own photomontage software at considerable expense. This is the same software the wind energy companies use themselves, and a member of our group received professional training before deploying it. Photographs 3 was taken a few metres from the developer's viewpoints, specifically to show the houses that will be affected. Our house is now visible where it should have been all along. (For transparency, the line of trees visible in the developer's photographs was cut down between when their images were taken and when ours were, that however does not affect where our house should have been in their original photo.)



Photograph 3: Greater Birr Wind Action Group photomontage, Rathbeg Lane (upper). Shane and Mary Hector's house is visible on the right. Shane's parents' house is on the left.

Photograph 4 shows what the actual visual impact will be on our precious home. This was taken a little further down that same lane, a position just as available to the developer, and the difference in what they show is stark. This is the photo that should have been in RWE's montage. The Ballincor turbines are not like the ones we can already see. They are three times the height of Knockshigowna turbines, a far bigger scale in a small, enclosed landscape. The Carrig development has now been granted planning permission and will be visible too. I understand that wind energy has a role to play in the country's future. But there is a difference between a landscape that carries one wind farm and a landscape that has been comprehensively industrialised from every direction. The visual dominance and clutter will be unbearable, and the cumulative effect on top of everything we can already see would be deeply unfair. The bog view that we have spent nineteen years living inside will become a turbine view.



Photograph 4: Greater Birr Wind Action Group photomontage, Rathbeg Lane (middle). Our house is on the right. Shane's parents' house is on the left.

We ask the Inspector to carry out a site visit to Rathbeg. No photograph, whether the developer's or ours, fully captures what this landscape looks and feels like from where we live. We believe that if the Inspector stands at this house and looks across that bog, they will understand immediately what is at stake.

The noise assessment submitted with this application contains a fundamental error that should not be overlooked. The JOULE valley correction is a mandatory calculation required under the Institute of Acoustics Good Practice Guide. The developer's noise consultants did not apply it. When the correction is applied to the developer's own submitted figures, ten properties across the study area show confirmed exceedances of the permitted nighttime noise limit. This is not a contested or alternative methodology. It is the required one. The developer chose not to use it. Our property, Rathbeg, is recorded as receptor H143. We are 1.49 kilometres from turbine T08, the nearest turbine to us, and we sit at 64 metres above sea level, noticeably higher than the bogland below. The noise that matters to us is not daytime machinery noise. It is the low-frequency nighttime noise from turbines that independent acoustic analysis shows the developer's own figures, properly corrected, cannot clear.

Mary has suffered from migraine clusters since she was ten years old. They come in clusters that can last eight to ten days at a time, receding for a few months and then returning. A migraine always begins over her left eye and, if it is not treated quickly, it will last three or four hours with excruciating pain behind her eye and forehead and a pulsing sensation across her whole head. The known triggers are glare, strong or flashing light, driving at night with headlights coming toward her, and stress. As already mentioned, Mary works from home. She is not behind a desk in a city. She is here, in this house or in the salon beside this bog. The shadow flicker assessment records

7.72 hours per year of worst-case flicker at our property, across up to 39 days, with a maximum of 21 minutes in a single day. For most households that might be manageable. For Mary it is not a matter of inconvenience. It is a known neurological trigger for a condition that has affected her since childhood, and the flicker from turbines visible from our kitchen window and from our main rooms is not something she can simply avoid by leaving the house on bad days. The developer's shadow flicker study drew its boundary at 1,630 metres. The developer's own WindPRO software, using the developer's own settings, calculated shadow effects extending to 1,789 metres in the primary scenario. Properties sitting between those two distances were excluded from the assessment despite falling within the range the developer's own model identified. Our property was included in the study, but the methodology behind it contains this known gap, and I do not have confidence that the full picture of flicker impact on surrounding homes was properly assessed.

The biodiversity picture on the ground is equally troubling. The marsh fritillary butterfly is listed under the EU Habitats Directive. The developer's own ecological report predicts that the local breeding population will be entirely wiped out by the construction works. The mitigation proposed is to move the caterpillars to a new location. The problem is that the receiving site does not contain devil's-bit scabious, which is the only plant the marsh fritillary caterpillar will eat. The developer's own documentation quoted expert guidance that this kind of relocation approach is scientifically unworkable, and then proposed it anyway. There is no credible solution on the table to avoid the total extinction of this protected population.

Slender Cottongrass (*Eriophorum gracile*), a Flora Protection Order plant grows in the section of Sharavogue Bog SAC that lies closest to the proposed construction works. The developer's assessment dismissed any concern about this on the basis that the plant was far enough away to require no further examination. The National Parks and Wildlife Service records show it is located in the lagg zone at the bog edge, which is exactly the strip of habitat most vulnerable to any interference with the groundwater system. The developer's own assessment identified the groundwater system as a pathway through which construction activities could affect the bog. The plant sits in the zone most likely to be affected by that very pathway, and the developer did not assess it.

The geotechnical picture is one that should concern any Inspector considering the proximity of this site to Sharavogue Bog SAC. Nine of the twelve trial pits dug into the peat during ground investigation collapsed before they could be properly examined. The borehole drilled closest to the most flood-prone turbine location found zero ground resistance for twelve metres below the surface. The developer's conclusion was that the turbines in this area present negligible risk, but only on the condition that a specific foundation safety design is prepared. That design does not exist. It has been deferred until after planning permission is granted. Under EU law, mitigation that has not been designed cannot be relied upon when assessing impacts on a European protected site. The harm cannot be excluded, and the solution to it is not yet on paper.

The developer expressly waived both legal routes that would allow permission to be granted even where some degree of harm to a European site was unavoidable. That means that if harm to Sharavogue Bog SAC or the Little Brosna Callows SPA cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt, there is no lawful basis to grant this permission. Given everything set out above regarding the groundwater pathway, the undesigned foundations and the Slender Cottongrass in the lagg zone, I do not see how that reasonable scientific doubt can be excluded.

The bird surveys submitted with this application are, in my view, so deficient that they cannot safely form the basis for any approval. The surveys ran for six years, which sounds thorough, until you look at when the work was actually done. The company that carried out the majority of the surveys conducted their observations in the middle of the day. The developer's own appointed expert acknowledged in his report that the surveys were concentrated during midday hours and that there was insufficient data to assess bird activity at dawn and dusk. That matters enormously here, because the species most at risk from turbine collision at this site, whooper swans, golden plover, curlew, are all species that move between feeding grounds and roosting sites at dawn and dusk. Those are the hours when strike risk is highest, and those are the hours for which this application has almost no data. Across four full winters of survey, the total time spent watching at sunset was sixteen minutes. Sixteen minutes across four winters. That is not a survey programme. It is a gap dressed up as one.

The merlin finding from May 2025 makes this worse. BirdWatch Ireland located a breeding merlin nest 2.8 kilometres from the Ballincor site using acoustic survey equipment that the developer never deployed. Merlin forage across a range of up to three kilometres from a nest, which means the turbine zone sits squarely within their foraging area. The developer's surveys recorded merlin as rarely present. Merlin is listed under Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. The breeding evidence was only found because someone used the right equipment. The developer did not.

The white-tailed eagle position is one that I find particularly hard to set aside. There are approximately 150 white-tailed eagles in the wild in Ireland. The species was gone from this country for over a century before being reintroduced from Norway. The developer assessed collision risk for this species using a statistical threshold that was designed for common birds with large, stable populations. That threshold is one that the developer's own expert acknowledged may be biologically inappropriate for a species as small in number as this one. A national population of 150 birds is not a population that absorbs losses the way a common species can. Losing a single bird from this scheme is losing close to one per cent of every wild white-tailed eagle in Ireland. That is not a tolerable level of risk, and the methodology used to assess it was one the developer's own expert had reservations about.

Since preparing this submission, we have made a further discovery at our property that I believe the Inspector should be aware of. On 5 June 2026 we found a kestrel chick in an outbuilding approximately fifty metres from our house. A photograph taken on that date is attached below. The chick is clearly a nestling, still in white down.



Photograph 5: Kestrel chick found in outbuilding at Rathbeg, Sharavogue, 5 June 2026.

Upon further investigation, we realised that this is not just one chick. As photos 6 and 7 show, there are a minimum of four kestrel chicks and both adults, meaning there is an active breeding pair of kestrels at our property at this moment. The parents are foraging from here daily across the farmland and bogland that lies between Rathbeg and the Ballincor site. The shed sits slightly further from the turbines than the house itself, approximately 1,500 metres from the nearest turbine, T08.

This is not the first year these birds have been with us in this area. We realised that this must be the same breeding pair that nested for the previous four or five years on the windowsill of a house, no more than about a hundred and eighty metres from where they are now in our shed. BirdWatch Ireland came out and saw the birds at that site themselves. So this is not a chance visitor that happened to turn up the summer the application was lodged. It is an established breeding territory that has held the same small patch of ground for the best part of six years, and one that BirdWatch Ireland already knew about. The developer's surveys ran for six years over this very ground and did not record it.



Photograph 6: Two young kestrels found in outbuilding at Rathbeg, Sharavogue, 10 June 2026.



Photograph 7: Kestrel chick found in grass at Rathbeg, Sharavogue, 10 June 2026.

The significance of this cannot be overstated. Kestrel was moved from the Amber to the Red List in the Birds of Conservation Concern Ireland report in 2021, driven by severe declines in breeding populations across Ireland. BirdWatch Ireland has identified kestrel as one of the fastest-declining farmland bird species in the country, alongside curlew, lapwing and snipe. A breeding kestrel fifty metres from this house is not incidental background wildlife. It is a Red-listed species in active national decline, with an active nest inside the zone of visual and acoustic influence of this development.

The relevance to this application is direct. Kestrel was confirmed present by BirdWatch Ireland's acoustic survey work at Ballyduff/Clonfinnane Bog SAC in May and June 2025, work carried out using methodology the developer never deployed. The developer's EIAR does not identify a breeding kestrel at or adjacent to a receptor

property within the development's zone of influence, and does not assess the collision risk to a breeding pair foraging between this property and the turbine zone. International research on raptor mortality at wind farms has found kestrel collision mortality to be notably high, a pattern linked directly to the species' characteristic hunting behaviour of hovering at height over open farmland and bogland, which places foraging birds directly in the rotor sweep zone of modern turbines. A kestrel pair foraging from a nest fifty metres from this house, across the open ground between Rathbeg and the Ballincor turbines, will pass through or in the vicinity of the rotor zone regularly. That risk has not been assessed anywhere in this application. I have reported this find to BirdWatch Ireland and to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and I ask the Inspector to note the presence of an active Red-listed breeding raptor at this property.

This application is for a site that the Offaly County Development Plan has specifically identified as unsuitable for wind energy development. That designation was not arrived at casually. It went through the full statutory process. The Coolglass decision confirmed that designations of this kind must be given real weight and that departing from them requires genuine and substantial justification. I have read this application carefully and I do not find that justification. What I find instead is deficient bird surveys, a protected species population written off with a mitigation measure the developer's own documentation says is unworkable, undesigned foundations deferred to after permission, a mandatory noise correction not applied, the visual impact assessed from viewpoints that omitted our house entirely, and the legal basis for any approval affecting these European sites undermined by the developer's own decisions.

People sometimes talk about Killarney and the lakes when they describe what Ireland looks like at its best. For us, it has always been the bogs of Offaly. Sharavogue Bog is one of the finest raised bogs in the country, in genuinely good condition, and it is on our doorstep. I have spent years taking our daughter out to it and showing her the wildlife, the plants, what makes a bog a bog, why it matters that it is still there. The thought of standing at that kitchen window and seeing eleven turbines where the bog horizon used to be is something I find very hard. But the grounds for refusal are not just personal ones. The surveys were inadequate, the ecology assessment contains demonstrable failures, the noise methodology was not correctly applied, and the legal basis for any approval affecting these European sites has been undermined by the developer's own decisions. I respectfully ask An Coimisiún Pleanála to refuse this application.

Yours sincerely,

Shane Hctor

Mary Hctor