

Submission of Felim Gurn C.C. Member of Leitrim County Council

Re: Lissinagroagh Wind Farm – Case Reference PAX12.324290

Dear Sir/Madam,

I make this submission objecting to the proposed Lissinagroagh Wind Farm.

I do so as a long-standing member of the Manorhamilton community, as a person who along with his family, has been in business in the town for approximately 50 years, as a county councillor, and as someone whose family has been involved in public life and local politics for generations.

I know Manorhamilton and North Leitrim not from a distance, but from a lifetime of living, working, trading, listening to people, dealing with families, hearing their concerns, and seeing first-hand both the strengths and the fragility of rural towns.

I have seen good times and very difficult times. I have recently had to cease my food business due to the combined pressures of electricity costs, staff costs, reduced footfall and reduced discretionary spending. That was not an easy decision. It brought home to me very clearly how difficult it has become to sustain small businesses in rural Ireland.

For that reason, I fully understand the need for cheaper energy, energy security, climate action and new thinking. I am not opposed to renewable energy. I support renewable energy. I support Ireland moving away from fossil fuels. I support practical measures that reduce electricity costs for households, businesses, farms and community facilities.

However, I do not accept that climate action requires the industrialisation of sensitive upland peatland landscapes such as Dough Mountain.

In my respectful submission, this proposed development is the wrong project in the wrong place. It is excessive in scale, inappropriate in location, and contrary to the long-term interests of Manorhamilton, North Leitrim and the wider county.

My objection is based on proper planning concerns, including landscape and visual impact, peatland and carbon storage, ecology, hydrology, agriculture, residential amenities, health and wellbeing, property value concerns, roads and access, tourism, local economic development and the long-term future of Leitrim.

1. The role of a councillor and the rates issue

As a county councillor, I am very conscious that commercial rates are a vital source of income for local authorities. I am also conscious that wind farms can provide significant rates of income to a county council.

That fact must be acknowledged honestly.

However, planning and environmental judgment cannot be reduced to a question of rates. A local authority's need for income cannot justify the permanent industrialisation of an

unspoiled upland landscape. Rates cannot compensate for the loss of scenery, clean water, clean air, quiet roads, peatland, community amenity, householder confidence, tourism value and rural quality of life.

The role of public representatives is not simply to welcome income streams. It is to protect communities, landscapes and future generations. That is especially so in a county like Leitrim, where our natural environment is one of our greatest assets.

If Leitrim loses the very things that make it special, no rates income can put that right.

2. Scale and visual impact

The proposed development involves fourteen turbines up to 185 metres high. That is industrial-scale infrastructure.

Turbines of this height would dominate Dough Mountain and the surrounding landscape. They would be visible over a wide area and would permanently alter the setting of Manorhamilton and the North Leitrim Glens.

This is not a small or modest development. It is a major intervention in a sensitive upland landscape. It would change the character of the area for residents, farmers, visitors, walkers, cyclists, motorists and future generations.

North Leitrim's landscape is not empty space. It is part of our identity. It is one of the reasons people live here, visit here, return here, open businesses here and promote this county. Once a landscape of this kind is industrialised, it is very difficult to restore its former character.

In my view, the visual impact alone is sufficient reason for serious concern.

3. Peatland, carbon and climate contradiction

I am particularly concerned about the impact on upland blanket peat.

Blanket peatland is a carbon store, a water management system, a habitat and an ecological resource. It is not wasteland. It is part of the natural infrastructure of the county.

A development of this scale would require turbine foundations, access roads, hardstanding areas, drainage works, excavation, cabling, concrete, tarmac, heavy construction traffic and long-term maintenance access. Those works have the potential to disturb peat, alter hydrology, release stored carbon and damage habitats.

There is a serious climate contradiction in damaging carbon-storing peatland in the name of climate action. The carbon benefit of renewable electricity must be assessed against the carbon cost and ecological cost of disturbing peatland and changing the natural water balance of the mountain.

Climate action should protect peatlands, not place them at risk.

4. Hydrology, clean water and downstream risk

Clean water is one of the greatest assets of rural Leitrim.

Upland peat landscapes hold, filter and slowly release water. They are sensitive hydrological systems. Interference with drainage, excavation, slope stability, access roads and peat structure can have consequences beyond the immediate development site.

The Board should consider the risk to streams, watercourses, wetlands, farmland, drainage patterns, water quality and downstream lands. These are not minor technical matters. They go to the heart of whether the site is suitable for a development of this scale.

Local people are entitled to be concerned about water. Farmers are entitled to be concerned. Householders are entitled to be concerned. The wider community is entitled to be concerned.

There should be no gamble with clean water.

5. Ecology, biodiversity and clean air

The ecological impact of this proposal should be given very serious weight.

The uplands around Dough Mountain form part of a wider ecological system. They include peatland, wet ground, watercourses, farmland, hedgerows, habitats and quiet areas of low disturbance. The value of such an area cannot be measured only by the footprint of each turbine.

The combined impact of roads, drainage, turbine bases, cabling, excavation, construction traffic, noise, lighting, ongoing maintenance and disturbance could be significant and long-lasting.

North Leitrim's clean air, clean water, biodiversity, open spaces and quiet countryside are not luxuries. They are part of the health and wellbeing of the community. They are also part of the county's economic future.

To damage these assets would be short-sighted.

6. Residential amenity, health and wellbeing

As a public representative, I have heard the fears of local people and landowners. I am extremely sympathetic to those fears.

Residents living near large wind farms are entitled to have their concerns taken seriously. They are concerned about noise, shadow flicker, sleep disturbance, visual dominance, traffic, construction disruption, property values and the general effect on quality of life.

Whether every fear is ultimately proven in every case is not the point. The point is that the planning system must protect residential amenities and community wellbeing. People should not feel that their homes, farms and peace of mind are being sacrificed for a national energy project from which they may receive little direct benefit.

Homes are not just financial assets. They are where families live, sleep, raise children, retire, work, recover and feel safe. If a development of this scale creates serious anxiety among residents and has the potential to affect amenity, wellbeing and property confidence, that is a proper planning concern.

The Board should give real weight to the voices of those who live closest to the proposed development.

7. Property values and community confidence

I am also concerned about the potential effect on property values and community confidence.

For many families, their home or farm is their principal asset. If people fear that a major industrial wind farm near their property will reduce its value, reduce its saleability, or make it less attractive as a place to live, those fears should not be dismissed lightly.

Even the perception of reduced value can have a real effect on people's lives and choices. It can affect whether young families stay, whether people invest in their homes, whether people renovate, whether people relocate to the area, and whether local communities feel confident about their future.

Leitrim is trying to attract people to live, work and invest here. That ambition is undermined if sensitive landscapes near communities are repeatedly targeted for industrial-scale infrastructure.

8. Agriculture and rural land use

The land around Dough Mountain forms part of a lived and worked rural landscape.

Agriculture in Leitrim is not easy. Farmers operate in challenging conditions and rely on land, water, access, drainage, grazing and local road networks. Upland and marginal land still forms part of a wider agricultural and ecological system.

The Board should consider the cumulative impact on farming and rural land use: construction traffic, road alterations, access restrictions, drainage effects, land disturbance, water concerns and long-term changes in the character of the area.

Rural Leitrim should not be treated as empty space available for industrial use.

9. Roads, access, traffic and green lanes

A development of fourteen turbines up to 185 metres high will require very significant transport and construction activity.

The movement of turbine components, cranes, concrete, stone, plant and other materials will place pressure on local roads and lanes. Roads may need to be widened, strengthened, altered or managed in ways that change their rural character.

Green lanes, quiet roads and upland routes are part of the amenity and tourism value of the area. They are used by farmers, walkers, cyclists, dog walkers, residents and visitors. They

should not be industrialised for the purpose of moving turbine components across an upland peatland landscape.

The disruption during construction would be serious. The permanent alteration of routes may be worse.

10. Tourism, footfall and the local economy

As someone who has been in business in Manorhamilton for approximately 50 years, I know how important footfall is. I also know how difficult it has become to keep local businesses open.

Reduced footfall and reduced discretionary spending are already hurting rural towns. That is one of the reasons I had to cease my own food business. We should therefore be very careful not to damage one of the few assets that still gives places like Manorhamilton a competitive advantage: our scenery, environment, outdoor amenity and quality of life.

Tourism in Leitrim depends on landscape. Walking, cycling, greenways, angling, heritage, hospitality, festivals, accommodation, food, craft, outdoor recreation and rural peace all depend on the county retaining its special character.

The industrialisation of Dough Mountain would not help that vision. It would undermine it.

Leitrim's long-term economic future should be based on sustainable tourism, greenways, clean water, high-quality rural living, small enterprise, remote working, sustainable farming, cultural activity and careful environmental stewardship.

11. Renewable energy is already being wasted

There is also a wider national energy issue which must be faced.

Ireland is already wasting significant amounts of renewable electricity because the grid, storage and wider energy system cannot always use it when it is available.

In 2024, according to EirGrid and SONI, 1,266 GWh of wind energy was dispatched down in Ireland. That represented 10.1% of available wind energy in Ireland. Across the island, 2,181 GWh of wind energy was dispatched down, representing 14% of available wind energy.

In plain English, large amounts of clean electricity are already being dumped or wasted.

This should be a turning point in how we think about renewable energy. The problem is not simply that Ireland needs more turbines in more places. The problem is that we have failed to invest sufficiently in grid capacity, storage, local demand flexibility and ways of using surplus renewable electricity.

Before sensitive upland peatlands are industrialised, Ireland should first use the renewable electricity it already produces.

Developers and State-backed energy companies should be incentivised, and where appropriate required, to invest in grid reinforcement, battery storage, long-duration storage, pumped hydro, thermal storage, smart charging, local community energy systems and practical ways to capture the energy currently being dispatched down.

It makes no sense to damage carbon-storing peatland while clean renewable electricity is already being wasted.

12. Offshore wind is the strategic opportunity

Ireland's real renewable energy opportunity is offshore.

The Atlantic seaboard has one of the strongest wind resources in Europe. Offshore wind, including floating offshore wind in deeper waters, offers Ireland the chance to generate renewable energy at a scale that could transform the country.

This approach has major advantages over placing industrial-scale turbines on sensitive upland peatland.

Offshore wind does not require the widening of rural Leitrim roads and green lanes for turbine transport. It does not require haul roads across blanket bog. It does not require turbine bases and hardstanding areas on upland peat. It does not create the same direct impact on local homes, farms, walking routes and scenic uplands.

It also offers a much greater economic opportunity.

Offshore wind could revitalise Irish ports. Ports could become centres for turbine assembly, maintenance, repair, storage, fabrication, training, marine services and electrical engineering. Floating offshore platforms, depending on design and port infrastructure, may be assembled or serviced through ports and in some cases towed for major maintenance. That creates opportunities for tug operators, engineers, technicians, electricians, marine contractors, fabricators and supply-chain businesses.

This is the type of renewable development that could create real jobs and lasting economic value.

Surplus renewable energy currently being dispatched down could also be put to work. It could power port operations, cranes, winches, battery systems, electrolyzers, electric or hybrid tugboats, hydraulic systems, thermal storage and flexible industrial uses.

That is strategic climate action. It is not merely building more turbines wherever a site can be assembled. It is building a national renewable energy system.

13. Rooftop solar, energy saving and local generation

Ireland should also be far more ambitious about energy saving and rooftop solar.

Every suitable roof and built surface should be considered. Farm sheds, schools, community buildings, public buildings, factories, warehouses, commercial premises, car parks and large domestic roofs should all be part of the solution.

Where owners want to use the electricity themselves, they should be supported. Where owners do not wish to use it, they should be paid fairly to make the space available.

This would generate power closer to demand. It would help households, farms, community groups and businesses. It would reduce pressure on sensitive landscapes. It would build public support for renewable energy.

Energy efficiency should also be treated as a national priority. The cheapest and cleanest electricity is the electricity we do not have to use. Retrofitting, insulation, efficient lighting, heat pumps where suitable, smart controls, demand management and business supports should all be part of the answer.

Small businesses like the one I operate have been badly affected by electricity costs. The national energy strategy must help businesses survive, not simply create more remote generation while grid constraints and high costs remain.

14. Leitrim can be a blueprint for better alternatives

Leitrim should not be seen as a soft target for industrial-scale wind development.

It should be a blueprint for better rural climate action: rooftop solar, community energy, storage, retrofitting, bog restoration, sustainable farming, greenways, clean water protection, biodiversity, local food, tourism, small enterprises, remote working and protection of landscape.

This is not anti-renewable. It is a better renewable strategy.

The people of Leitrim are not opposed to progress. They are asking for the right kind of progress. They are asking that their landscape, homes, farms, water, health, amenity and future not be treated as expendable.

The Board should listen to those concerns.

15. Conclusion

I respectfully request that permission be refused.

This proposed wind farm is excessive in scale and inappropriate in location. It would have unacceptable impacts on landscape, peatland, carbon storage, hydrology, ecology, agriculture, residential amenities, health and wellbeing, roads, tourism, property confidence and the long-term sustainable development of Manorhamilton and North Leitrim.

I say this as someone who supports renewable energy and understands the need for cheaper and cleaner electricity. I also say it as someone who has lived through the pressures facing

rural businesses, who understands the value of footfall and tourism, who has listened to local people, and who knows how precious our landscape, clean air and clean water are.

Wind farm rates may help local authority finances, but they cannot justify sacrificing unspoiled scenery, community wellbeing and sensitive upland peatland.

Ireland should call a halt to this kind of development in the wrong place and pursue better alternatives: offshore wind, port development, grid reinforcement, storage, rooftop solar, energy efficiency, community energy and the proper use of renewable electricity that is currently being wasted.

Dough Mountain is the wrong place for an industrial-scale wind farm.

For all of the above reasons, I respectfully request that permission be refused.

Yours faithfully,

[Felim Gurn]
[Main Street]
Manorhamilton Co.
Leitrim