



Muingmore Wind Farm – Case Reference PAX16.324387

Submitted by Deborah O’Sullivan, Director, Erris Coast Hotel, Geesala, Co. Mayo F26 H6C2

2nd August 2026

I make this submission in my capacity as a Director of the Erris Coast Hotel in Geesala. My concerns relate particularly to the potential long-term effects of the proposed Muingmore Wind Farm on tourism, employment, investment and the economic, cultural and community life of Geesala and the wider Erris region. The Erris Coast Hotel is a tourism business whose future is directly connected to the character of this place: its landscape, tranquillity, cultural heritage, quiet roads, dark skies and the sense of escape that draws visitors to Erris in the first place.

The Erris Coast Hotel is not simply an accommodation provider. We are the largest employer in the Kiltane parish and, to the best of my knowledge, one of the ten largest employers in the wider Erris area. Our staff are overwhelmingly local people who live locally, raise their families locally and spend their wages locally. The wages generated by the hotel therefore circulate throughout Erris, supporting other shops, businesses, services and families. We also contribute several thousand euro each year through sponsorship, prizes and support for local sports clubs, community organisations and charities.

This contribution is particularly important in an area that has historically experienced emigration and limited employment opportunities. The applicant’s own population figures show that the population within its study area declined between 2016 and 2022, while the population of County Mayo and the State increased. Against that background, sustainable local employment should be regarded as an important asset to be protected and strengthened.

One of the most encouraging things for us is the number of young people from Geesala and the surrounding villages who work in the hotel. We already have younger teenagers enquiring about positions for next summer when they will be old enough to work. For many, the hotel provides a first job, work experience, confidence and an opportunity to earn money without having to leave their own community. In a region that has lost generations of young people to emigration, that matters.

The hotel was closed for several years before it was purchased, extensively refurbished and reopened. Anyone familiar with Geesala during the years when the hotel was closed will understand the difference its reopening has made to the village. There is now a constant flow of guests, employees, weddings, family celebrations, diners and visitors. The village is once again bustling with life, and the hotel has become an important focal point for both the local community and the visitor economy.

We have invested heavily in the property and we continue to reinvest because we believe in the long-term future of tourism in Erris. Recent additions include our spa and indoor golf simulator, both designed to broaden the visitor experience, extend stays and provide additional amenities for local people as well as tourists. These are long-term investments based on confidence in Geesala as a destination. They are not investments made with a short construction cycle in mind.

Almost 85% of our hotel guests are tourists. Of those tourists, approximately 60% have already returned to us for a second or third visit. That level of repeat business is particularly significant because it gives us direct, first-hand evidence of what visitors value about Erris. They return because this place offers something that is increasingly difficult to find elsewhere: open landscape, an unspoilt coastline, quiet roads, dark skies, clean air, peace, natural beauty and a genuine sense of escape.

Our guests include walkers, hikers and cyclists who use the hotel as a base from which to explore the wider Erris landscape. Others come for photography, wildlife, heritage, literature and culture, while many simply want to leave behind the pace and noise of urban life for a few days. Erris was recognised as Ireland's Best Place to Go Wild, a description that captures remarkably well the tourism product that has developed here. Our strength is not mass tourism. It is the very fact that Erris feels remote, authentic, peaceful and relatively untouched.

The applicant itself recognises the importance of these characteristics. Volume 2 chapter 4 refers to Mayo's natural resources, unspoilt environment and scenic and sensitive landscapes as part of the county's tourism potential. It also refers to tourism objectives which seek to use Mayo's natural and heritage resources in a way that complements the county's scale, quality and unique features. Those principles are entirely consistent with what we experience every day in the hotel: the landscape is not simply a backdrop to tourism in Erris; it is a central part of the product.

I readily acknowledge that there may be a temporary increase in demand for accommodation, food and other services during the construction phase and that the Erris Coast Hotel could potentially receive some business from that activity. It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that possibility. However, a temporary construction-related increase in occupancy cannot be confused with a sustainable tourism strategy for the hotel or the wider area.

Construction is short lived. The hotel must continue to trade long after construction workers, contractors and temporary demand have moved on. The applicant itself describes construction employment as temporary and acknowledges that only a small proportion of the estimated operational employment is likely to be based within the study area. The question for me as a Director of a tourism business is therefore not whether we might sell additional rooms for a short period during construction, but what the consequences will be for our business over the decades that follow.

What is the long-term benefit to the Erris Coast Hotel from a development of this scale when our business is overwhelmingly dependent on tourism? Will our electricity be cheaper as a result? Will an industrial-scale wind farm make visitors more likely to choose Geesala and Erris for a holiday, or less likely? Will it encourage walkers, cyclists, photographers, wedding couples and visitors seeking wilderness and tranquillity to stay longer and return, or will it weaken the very qualities that distinguish this destination from countless others? These are not theoretical questions for us. They go directly to the future viability of our business and the livelihoods that depend upon it.

Geesala also has an important cultural and literary story which I believe deserves far greater recognition in considering the tourism value of the area. John Millington Synge, one of Ireland's most important playwrights, spent time in this part of Mayo, and his experiences in the west of Ireland form part of the cultural world associated with his writing and with *The Playboy of the Western World*. This connection remains very much alive in the Erris Coast Hotel.

Within the hotel we retain the original fireplace beside which Synge sat during his time here while penning his writings. We also have a specially commissioned piece of artwork depicting Synge's life and his connection with the area, which is displayed prominently in the hotel. These are not decorative details without meaning. We regularly welcome cultural and arts visitors with a particular interest in Irish literature, history, heritage and the stories associated with the west of Ireland. For these visitors, landscape and culture are inseparable. They come not merely to see a building or an artefact, but to experience the place and atmosphere connected with the story.

This form of cultural tourism is particularly valuable to rural areas because it complements walking, cycling, heritage and nature-based tourism and encourages visitors to travel beyond the better-known tourism centres. It is precisely the kind of distinctive, place-based tourism that Mayo should be protecting and developing.

My concerns are also informed by my involvement in tourism development beyond the hotel itself. I sit on the steering committee for Wild Mayo and I am also involved in the committee working on the development of Mayo as Ireland's spiritual capital. While these initiatives have different strands, the qualities on which they depend are remarkably similar: escapism, peace, natural beauty, tranquillity, reflection, heritage and connection with landscape and place.

These are increasingly valuable assets in modern tourism. Following years in which rural communities like ours struggled to retain population and employment, we are now seeing an opportunity to build a sustainable visitor economy around exactly the characteristics that Erris possesses naturally. It is difficult to reconcile a strategy based on peace, wilderness, beauty and spiritual or reflective tourism with the industrialisation of the same landscape on which that strategy depends.

I am particularly concerned by the way Geesala is represented within the application. In the photomontage identified as "Local Road at Gweesalia – VP22", the representation appears to focus on a selected and limited number of properties rather than conveying the true scale and character of Geesala as a living village. The school, Erris Coast Hotel, pub, shop, playground and community centre are among the facilities which collectively demonstrate the level of activity and community infrastructure present here, yet the chosen representation gives a much smaller and less active impression of the settlement.

I am concerned that this has the effect, whether intentional or not, of visually downsizing the village and understating the nature of the receiving environment. A decision-maker unfamiliar with Geesala should be given an accurate understanding of what is here. This is not simply a scattered collection of houses. It is a functioning village with a school, church, hotel, pub, shop, community facilities, employment and a substantial tourism presence. I have included an image showing Geesala village in its entirety, so that its true scale and character can be appreciated alongside the reality of what is proposed.

I have similar concerns regarding the description of local amenities in Chapter 4. The relevant section does not, in my view, adequately convey the significance of the hotel, school, church, pub, shop and other facilities as part of a thriving village. Furthermore, the distance stated for the Erris Coast Hotel is incorrect. The application refers to the hotel as being approximately 4.6 km from the Main Wind Farm Development Site, whereas the closest proposed turbine is approximately 1.6 km from the hotel. That difference is substantial and creates a materially different impression of the hotel's relationship to the proposed development. To put the scale of the proposed development into perspective, the Erris Coast Hotel is a substantial two-storey building, yet a 180-metre turbine would be approximately twenty times its height. This illustrates the enormous scale of the structures proposed, with the nearest turbine potentially only 1.6 km from the hotel and Geesala village.

I am particularly concerned that the Erris Coast Hotel does not appear to have been included as a sensitive receptor in the Shadow Flicker Assessment. This is especially difficult to understand given that Mayo County Council specifically highlighted businesses and hospitality premises and their associated amenity areas as receptors requiring consideration.

The hotel is a significant tourism business and local employer, accommodating thousands of visitors to Erris. While the hotel building may fall just outside the applicant's defined shadow flicker study area, our gardens and outdoor amenity areas lie only a matter of metres beyond that assessment boundary. The exclusion therefore appears to arise from the application of a numerical cut-off rather than from any assessment of whether a significant tourism receptor immediately outside that line could actually be affected.

This is particularly relevant because the hotel grounds are not incidental to our business. They are extensively used by guests, including wedding parties for photographs and outdoor gatherings, and form part of the visitor experience we provide. A tourism and hospitality receptor cannot reasonably be considered solely by reference to the walls and windows of the main building while disregarding the outdoor amenity areas used by its guests.

Shadow flicker does not cease to exist at an artificial line on a map. Where a substantial hospitality premises and its outdoor amenity are situated immediately beyond that line, I believe good planning and a precautionary approach should have required site-specific consideration rather than automatic exclusion. I therefore respectfully request that An Coimisiún Pleanála examine why the Erris Coast Hotel and its associated grounds were omitted and satisfy itself that the potential shadow flicker effects on the hotel, its gardens and its visitors have been adequately assessed before determining the application.

The proposed turbines would introduce very large, moving industrial structures into a landscape that our guests currently experience as rural and natural. For a wedding couple choosing a location partly because of its landscape, or for an overseas visitor photographing the area because of its perceived wildness and authenticity, that change is relevant. The visual environment is part of what we sell.

I am also concerned about construction traffic, abnormal loads, diversions, roadworks and delays. Our staff travel these roads every day to get to and from work. Our guests are often unfamiliar with the local

road network and many have travelled significant distances to reach us. Disruption that may appear temporary when assessed as part of a construction programme can have a very immediate effect on the experience of an individual visitor.

This is especially relevant to the large number of hikers and cyclists who stay with us. Quiet rural roads are part of the attraction of Erris for these visitors. Increased heavy construction traffic, road restrictions and abnormal load movements have the potential to make those routes less attractive and, at times, less comfortable to use. A guest delayed reaching the hotel, a cyclist encountering repeated heavy vehicle movements, or a walker faced with diversions and roadworks will judge the destination on that experience. Tourism reputation is built guest by guest, review by review and recommendation by recommendation.

The applicant's own assessment concludes that effects on recreation, amenity and tourism during the operational phase will be moderate and long term, even though it subsequently categorises the effect as not significant in EIA terms. For a business in which almost 90% of guests are tourists, a moderate and long-term effect on tourism cannot simply be regarded as inconsequential because it falls below a particular technical threshold.

Our hotel must operate within the real economy rather than an assessment matrix. A relatively small reduction in destination appeal, repeat visitation, wedding demand, walking or cycling tourism can have a significant cumulative effect on a rural hotel over many years. The fact that approximately 60% of our tourist guests are already repeat visitors demonstrates how important reputation and loyalty are to our business. Protecting the reason they return is fundamental.

I fully recognise the need for renewable energy and the wider challenge of climate change. My objection is not to renewable energy in principle. My concern is whether an industrial development of this scale, in this location, is compatible with a community that is actively attempting to build a sustainable economy around tourism, landscape, culture, heritage and outdoor recreation.

We have invested heavily in the Erris Coast Hotel because we believe in Geesala and in the future of Erris. We continue to reinvest in the business. Our employees have built livelihoods around it. Young people in our village are already asking when they can start working with us. Local clubs, charities and organisations benefit from the support of businesses such as ours. Visitors return for their second and third stays because Erris still offers something increasingly rare.

We are building our future around the fact that Erris is different. Once that difference is lost, it cannot simply be recreated through a marketing campaign.

I therefore ask An Coimisiún Pleanála to consider not merely whether tourists can continue to visit an area containing this development, but whether the proposed development is compatible with the very reasons tourists currently choose Erris over somewhere else. For the Erris Coast Hotel, our employees and the wider tourism economy that is finally beginning to flourish in this part of Mayo, that distinction is fundamental.

I strongly believe that approving this development would put at risk the very qualities upon which our tourism industry, local employment and future prosperity depend, and that permission should therefore be refused.

Yours sincerely,
Deborah O'Sullivan
Director
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Geesala, Co. Mayo

