



**STATKRAFT**

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT  
(EIAR) FOR THE PROPOSED DERNACART WIND FARM,  
COUNTY LAOIS**

**VOLUME 2 MAIN EIAR**

**CHAPTER 5 - EIA SCOPING AND CONSULTATION**

**DECEMBER 2019**





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Laois County Council Planning Authority, Viewing Purposes Only

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## 5 EIA SCOPING AND CONSULTATION

### 5.1 Introduction

Consultation is an important part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This chapter describes the consultation process and EIAR scoping that was undertaken in order to identify key effects from the proposed Dernacart Wind Farm development to be included in the EIAR. The consultation process carried out for the proposed development site has been a lengthy, detailed and thorough process. A number of points and submissions were raised as part of the consultation process which have informed this EIAR and survey methodologies.

This chapter presents the key points that arose through the consultation process and how these points were assessed in the EIAR. The consultation process, scoping and pre-application consultation undertaken in respect of the proposed development are set out in this chapter.

Through the consultation process, specific regard has been taken to the *Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland – Guidelines for Community Engagement* published on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2016 by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. “*This Code of Good Practice is intended to ensure that wind energy development in Ireland is undertaken in observance with the best industry practices, and with the full engagement of communities around the country*”. Statkraft Ireland had regard throughout the pre-planning process of the practical steps that wind farm promoters should comply with, in engaging with communities as set out in this Guidance.

Following consultation, the layout of the wind farm has been reduced from nine turbines to eight turbines. The overall area of the wind farm has also reduced, reducing effects on habitats and species in the area. The applicant has also committed to zero shadow flicker at residences.

### 5.2 Scoping

The purpose of the EIA scoping process is to identify the key points and issues which are likely to be important during the environmental impact assessment (EIA) and to eliminate those that are not. The scoping process identifies sources or causes of potential environmental effects, the pathways by which the effects can happen, and the sensitive receptors, which are likely to be affected. It defines the appropriate level of detail for the information to be provided in the EIAR. In essence, the primary focus of scoping is to define the most appropriate assessment of significant effects related to the proposed development.

A scoping document which included a description of the proposed development, draft of the preliminary site boundary and preliminary contents was forwarded to 45 consultees on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2019. The recipients included the Local Authority, Government Departments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), interested parties and key stakeholders. Table 5-1 sets out the consultees who received a copy of the scoping document. The scoping document is included in Appendix 5.1.

**Table 5-1: List of Consultees**

Consultee	Consultee
An Chomhairle Ealaíon	Irish Farmers Association
An Garda Síochána	Irish Parachute Club
An Taisce	Irish Peatland Conservation Council
Bat Conversation Ireland	Irish Raptor Study Group
Birdwatch Ireland	Irish Red Grouse Association
Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Water and Energy	Irish Water
Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine	Irish Wildlife Trust

Consultee	Consultee
Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Laois Local Community Development Committee
Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - Development Applications Unit	National Monuments Service
Department of Defence	National Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government	National Trails Office
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	National Transport Authority
Dublin Airport Authority	Offaly County Council - Planning Department
Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly	Office of Public Works (OPW)
Environment Department, Laois County Council	Planning Department, Laois County Council
Environmental Protection Agency	Roads Department, Laois County Council
Fáilte Ireland	Sport Ireland
Gas Networks Ireland	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
Geological Survey of Ireland	Teagasc
Health Service Executive - Environmental Health Department	The Heritage Council
Heritage Officer, Laois County Council	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Údarás na Gaeltachta
Irish Aviation Authority	Waterways Ireland
Irish Aviation Authority	
Limetree Airfield	
Ridge Aviation	
Kilrush Airfield	
Birr Airfield	

Consultation was also undertaken with regard telecommunications. Those providers that were consulted are detailed in Table 5-2.

**Table 5-2: Telecom Providers Consulted**

Operator	Operator
Airspeed / Enet	Imagine Broadband
An Garda Síochána	Laois County Council
Broadcast Authority of Ireland	Ripplecom
BT Ireland	2RN
Eir / Meteor	Tetra Ireland
OpenEir	Three Ireland
ESB Services	Virgin Media
HSE	Vodafone
Irish Aviation Authority	

Detailed responses received are contained in Appendix 5.2. A summary of the responses is presented in Table 5-3.

**Table 5-3: Summary of Consultation Responses Received**

Consultee	Key Points Raised	Chapter of EIAR where comments are addressed
Birdwatch Ireland	Potential impacts on River Barrow and River Nore SAC and Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA. Impacts on Annex IV species, species protected under the Wildlife Acts, species protected under the Flora Protection Order and red data book species should be assessed. Also impacts on corridors as per Article 10 of the Habitats Directive to be assessed. Cumulative assessment should take into account other wind farm developments. The assessment should include Collision Risk Modelling and BWI have concerns over impacts to Hen Harrier, Merlin, Red Grouse and Curlew.	Chapter 12 Biodiversity and NIS
Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine	Felling requirements detailed.	Replant Lands Assessment
Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - Development Applications Unit	Requirements for the assessment are detailed. This includes test trenching and underwater archaeological assessment. Following further correspondence, it was agreed that underwater archaeology should be considered in the assessment.	Chapter 15 Archaeology, Architectural and Cultural Heritage
Department of Defence	Details of the assessment to be made available. Condition requirements detailed for obstacle lighting and obstruction lights.	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
Environmental Protection Agency	EPA does not deal with unlicensed developments	
Fáilte Ireland	Submission details the importance of tourism to the economy. Refer to the Fáilte Ireland EIA Guidelines.	
Geological Survey of Ireland	Response related to Geoheritage sites, landslides, groundwater. Request for reports on any site investigations.	Ch. 13 Lands, Soils and Geology
Health Services Executive	Guidelines to be followed detailed. Submission concerns public consultation, impacts on wells and details the assessments being undertaken in the EIAR.	Chapter 5 Scoping and Consultation Chapter 13 Lands, Soils and Geology
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Aquatic biodiversity to be assessed. Recommendations for surveys. Electrofishing to be conducted. Concerns over soil stability. With regard to drainage, settlement ponds to be maintained where appropriate during the operational phase. Concerns raised over the construction of roads, stockpiling. IFI to be consulted in relation to crossings of watercourses and any diversions. Instream works to be carried out in the open season – 1 <sup>st</sup> July – 30 <sup>th</sup> September.	Chapter 12 Biodiversity and NIS; Chapter 14 Hydrology and Water Quality; Chapter 13 Land, Soils and Geology

Consultee	Key Points Raised	Chapter of EIAR where comments are addressed
	Crossing of watercourses for cables should also be examined, with particular regard to the crossing of the River Barrow, south west of Portarlinton and the crossing of Cottoner's Brook.	
Irish Aviation Authority	Response from Air Traffic Control stating they wouldn't anticipate an issue. If planning is granted, details of turbines, ground elevations, obstacle lights to be provided to IAA.	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
Irish Aviation Authority	IAA has no specific observations at this time. Details of obstacle warning lights, turbine coordinates, ground levels and tip heights to be provided to IAA if permission is granted. The IAA require a minimum of 30 days prior notification with regard to the erection of turbines.	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
Laois County Council	Requirements detailed in relation to the cable route from the wind farm to the substation including preconstruction surveys, conditions surveys, traffic management plan, details of laybys, remedial works.	Chapter 10 Traffic and Transportation
Offaly County Council - Planning and Roads Department	Details guidelines to be followed and reference to the County Development Plan. Sources of aggregate to be detailed. Pavement survey of roads to be conducted and damage caused by construction to be fixed. General requirements during and prior to construction detailed. Turbine Delivery Route requirements detailed. Materials delivery routes requirements detailed. Requirements for the cable route detailed.	Chapter 10 Traffic and Transportation
Planning Department, Laois County Council	No comments at this time	
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	EIAR to identify methods/techniques for any works traversing/in proximity to the national road network. Consultation to be conducted with the National Roads Design Office with regard to existing and future national road schemes. Use of private lands for cable laying to be considered. Cable route should avoid all impacts to TII infrastructure such as traffic counters, weather stations etc. Clearly identify haul routes. Dependent on thresholds and criteria, a Traffic and Transport Assessment should be carried out. TII standards to be consulted to determine the requirement for a Road Safety Audit and Road Safety Impact Assessment.	Chapter 10 Traffic and Transportation
Airspeed/Enet	No Issues.	
An Gard Siochána	No response received.	

Consultee	Key Points Raised	Chapter of EIA where comments are addressed
Broadcast Authority of Ireland	No response received.	
BT Ireland	No Issues.	
Eir / Meteor	Eir/Meteor raised concerns regarding one microwave radio link (Capard – Cooltycannon).	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
OpenEir	OpenEir raised concerns regarding one microwave radio link; however, they have stated that they expect this link to be decommissioned in the next few months.	
ESB Services	No response received.	
HSE	No response received.	
Irish Aviation Authority	No response received.	
Imagine Broadband	No Issues.	
Laois County Council	No response received.	
Ripplecom	No response received.	
2RN	No Issues.	
Tetra Ireland	No response received.	
Three Ireland	No Issues.	
Virgin Media	No Issues.	
Vodafone	Vodafone Ireland have raised concerns regarding one microwave radio link (Capard – Clonyquin)	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
Limetree Airfield	Concerned about the closeness to the airfield. Tip heights and turbine coordinates were requested and sent. No further comments.	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation
Ridge Aviation	No impacts identified.	Chapter 9 Telecommunications and Aviation

### 5.3 Consultation with Key Stakeholders

A pre-planning meeting was held in Laois County Council on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Those in attendance were:

- Donal Kiely, Laois County Council
- Colin Doyle, Laois County Council
- Steven Craig, Laois County Council
- Farhan Nasim, Laois County Council
- Tim Coffey, Statkraft
- Jim Hughes, Fehily Timoney and Company

Items discussed included the layout of the wind farm, the grid connection to either Mountmellick substation or the proposed Bracklone substation. The cumulative effects with other wind farms in the wider area was discussed and Laois County Council requested two additional locations for photomontages.

It was recognised that the principle of wind energy was acceptable in the area and that the area had a low density of population. Information was provided on the grid connection and it was agreed that suitable engineering solutions are available to traverse watercourses including Directional Drilling to ensure that no in-stream works take place.

A pre-planning meeting was also held in Offaly County Council on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 to discuss the grid connection route. Those in attendance were:

- Carroll Melia, Offaly County Council
- Mark Mahon, Offaly County Council
- John McNally, Offaly County Council
- Willie Ryan, Offaly County Council
- Tim Coffey, Statkraft
- Elaine Bennett, Fehily Timoney and Company

Items discussed included the scoping report and Offaly County Council (OCC) indicated that it would be circulated internally and to the prescribed bodies and they would revert with any comments.

The substation connection was discussed. Mountmellick and the proposed Bracklone substation were initially considered, however, following discussions with EirGrid, there is insufficient capacity at Mountmellick substation and so Statkraft indicated that the project will proceed with a connection to Bracklone substation.

The grid connection was discussed, it will be within the road corridor and OCC indicated to construct within the verge where possible. Where the grid connection is to be laid in the road, OCC indicated that at a minimum a single lane reinstatement would be required and where the road is on bog, a full width reinstatement would be required.

The issue of alternatives was discussed and that all reasonable alternatives should be considered. The County Development Plan and any relevant Local Area Plans should be reviewed. The cumulative impacts with other wind farms should also be included e.g. Moanvane Wind Farm.

Community gain was discussed and should be focused on the people closest. Local community projects, home improvements, direct dividends and investment opportunities should be considered.

## 5.4 Community Engagement and Consultation

Dernacart wind farm commenced the public consultation in September 2019 at an early stage in the development process. A Community Liaison Strategy (CLS) was established and set into motion with a nominated Community Liaison Officer (CLO) being appointed. Since this time, the CLO has been the main point of contact with the local community.

The CLS is based on the 'Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland Guidelines for Community Engagement' (December 2016). The Code's core fundamentals are to engage with the local community in an open, honest and transparent manner with the aim to not only provide clear and understandable information on a project but also to gain feedback to understand the views of the local community and to use this information to inform the design process. This allows the local community an opportunity to have an input in the design process and an influence on the final project design. The CLS was based on the fundamental principle of active engagement with all households within a minimum of 1.4km of the design layout under consideration with the view to opening a two-way dialog with people in this area. To date, all houses in this area have been called to with project information and contact details provided. 128 meetings have been held with residents in the local area. Some of these meetings were on an individual basis and others were in the form of meeting small groups of people together. The form that the meetings took in terms of numbers was dictated by the local residents and we worked to facilitate their schedules and preferred format in all cases.

There are 29 houses within 1km and of these 75% engaged and met with us. Residents in all houses within 1.4km of the proposed layout were provided with information, with the consultation area extending to 1.6km and beyond in certain instances.

The core objective of this approach was to provide information on what was being considered and to receive feedback from people in the local community which would be used to inform the design process.

An important aspect of the community engagement strategy was the distribution of project information and the gathering of feedback. The CLO called to all houses within 1.6km of the design layout to provide the following information:

- A Project Booklet
- Details on the Project website
- Contact details for contacting the CLO at any time
- Newsletter distribution to coincide with planning submission

Copies of the above listed material can be found in appendix 5.3.

### **Project Brochure**

The CLO called to all houses in the area with a detailed project booklet in September 2019. The main intention of this meeting was for the CLO to introduce himself, provide contact details and to provide information on the project under consideration with the view to establishing a line of dialogue between the company and local residents. At the initial meetings, information and a booklet on the project being considered were provided. The project brochure was in the form of a 12-page Project Information booklet which detailed information on what was being considered, outlined the opportunity to provide feedback, advised how this feedback would be used in the design process and provided information on where people could get further information. Project contact and website details were clearly outlined on this brochure. A copy of this booklet is contained in Appendix 5.3.

This booklet also endeavoured to provide educational information on the issues of climate change and fossil fuel dependency in order to provide context on why this project was being considered. The booklet outlined how the project could bring benefits to the local area and sought feedback from people on how they thought that the community benefit fund should be utilised. A flexible approach has been taken to facilitate the timing of meetings i.e. arrangements to meet with people at times and locations convenient to them. There are 29 houses within 1km of proposed turbines (with all houses in the community not associated with the project 740m or over from a turbine) and c. 54 houses in total within the 1.4km consultation area as identified within the CLS. Engagement ultimately extended beyond the CLS identified area and reached 1.6 kilometres and over of the proposed turbine locations. Over 100 households were individually contacted with information regarding the proposed project seeking feedback on the proposal.

### **Feedback and Design Review**

Feedback from meetings with people in this area showed that, the need to take effective climate action was well understood in the area. It was also apparent, that many people in this area are considering what changes they will need to make in their daily lives in order to play their part in combating climate change. Recent flooding events in the town of Mountmellick and across the local area were very much to the forefront of many people's minds. This said, whilst the need for the development of renewable energy was appreciated, there remained an apprehension in terms of the development of wind energy in the area which was fundamentally based on the fact that it was considered that this would lead to change in the area. In terms of this change, the most significant factors included the visual change that would occur (although many accepted that there was good screening in many locations across the local area), any changes that might happen to the hydrology system in the area and change in general terms of the whole area around transitioning to a low carbon society and what that will mean for families and individuals. It was generally accepted that the community benefit fund could deliver a significant opportunity to allow people living closest to the development to benefit from locally generated electricity and the overall transition to a low carbon society

Feedback gathered during this consultation process in relation to the design of the proposal was relayed to the design team who worked to take on board the views and concerns expressed by the local community. A design review process was undertaken where this feedback was considered along with technical appraisals. The process allowed the design team the opportunity to make amendments to the design layout and project being considered in order to address the local feedback received.

The main queries that were initially raised related to how this proposal would work in terms of setback, shadow flicker and noise. During these one to one meetings, it was explained that these factors had been already taken into account by the design team based on feedback commonly received from communities. A revision of the initial layout was carried out and the proposed design resulted from this review process. The design proposal being brought forward for consultation included fewer turbines, a commitment to eliminate shadow flicker and with a setback distance of 740m and over to the nearest home in the community not connected with the wind farm. Any potential noise from the development had been reduced. This was also outlined within the project booklet. These early design changes were welcomed and were generally seen to address the initial concerns that people had.

Queries were received on traffic management from a number of houses in the consultation area. These queries related to the use of local roads during the construction process and concerns that increased traffic volumes could make it more difficult or potentially dangerous particularly during school run times. Feedback was taken into consideration during a review of the project which led directly to two local roads being prohibited from use during the construction period. This design change resulted directly from local feedback to our community liaison team.

Three houses in the area raised concerns in relation to autism. During our consultation with those who engaged with us on this, we reiterated our commitment to eliminating shadow flicker and provided contact details for a number of schools for children with special needs, including autism, that have direct and first-hand experience of both bringing these children to local wind farms and in the case of at least one of these schools, caring for children who live close to wind farms without experiencing any ill effects. A commitment was also given to provide information on the technical aspects of how the shadow flicker control system would work.

The booklets which were provided during this consultation process included a map detailing the proposed turbine locations overlaid onto an OSI background. The OSI mapping used was the most up to date and current mapping available. Unfortunately, however, approximately five houses in the local area did not appear to have been surveyed by the OSI and as such were not detailed on these maps. Our Community Liaison Officer provided maps with an up to date aerial background and project layout to these residents and they were reassured that our surveys were not solely based on the OSI information and that our design team had been aware of their houses from the early stages of the design process.

In terms of other local issues that were raised, a number of people highlighted to the community liaison team that local flooding had been an issue in recent years. It was generally accepted that should climate change go unchecked, that this area was likely to experience extreme weather events and associated flooding on a more frequent basis in the years to come. Despite this, some still held concerns that the proposed development could potentially cause an issue with increased run off which could increase the river levels at critical times. Our consultation team sought information from our design team in terms of the hydrology surveys and predictions associated with this project which showed that, given the design of the wind farm in terms of the use of existing roads and the design of the drainage system which is designed specifically for the local topography, the impacts of the wind farm on river levels would be negligible. This information was provided to the residents concerned and it was also explained to them that the wind farm was being designed for a 1 in 100-year flood event plus an additional 20% to allow for climate changes. Whilst this information was well received and whilst it was accepted that climate action was very important in terms of reducing the potential for future flood events, it was explained to us that flooding is a concern in the area, regardless of our project coming to the area at all and that this is has been a major concern in the area for some time. We advised that whilst, based on our surveys and hydrology design models, we have full confidence that the proposed wind farm will not cause or have any noticeable impact on flood events in the area, the fundamental behind the concept of the community benefit fund is to deliver benefits for the people living in the local area. This would normally be viewed in terms of climate change adaptation measures such as the Greener Living Initiatives but that where climate change adaptation measures would be seen as a benefit, this could also be considered.

Feedback was also received on the community benefit aspect of the project. This is outlined in the section below in 'Consultation on Community Benefit'.

### **Project Newsletter**

A project newsletter was circulated to all houses visited during the consultation process to coincide with the submission of the planning application. This circulation process was carried out by personally by the project CLO and efforts were made to meet with all homeowners in this area to discuss the project and provide updates.

This newsletter gave feedback from the consultation process, detailed an estimated timeline for submitting the planning application and an indicative timeline for the future stages of the development process. People were again encouraged to continue to provide feedback and to visit the project website for updates or to contact the Community Liaison Officer for additional information.

### **Project Website**

A project-specific Website ([www.dernacartwindfarm.ie](http://www.dernacartwindfarm.ie)) has been established for the proposal. This website went online in September 2019 shortly after the commencement of community engagement. The purpose of the website is to provide the public and all stakeholders with an up to date platform on which information regarding the project is contained. It displays up to date information on the proposed development. The project website is used to provide context for the project, an educational section to develop a greater understanding of the issues being faced, how these issues can be addressed and the need for renewable energy development. The website also provides project information and information on the consultation approach. The Project Website will evolve with the project and continue to provide a source of updated information as the project progresses. The aim has been to keep the information clear, concise and engaging on this website.

### **Consultation on Community Benefit**

Over the course of engagement with the local community/individuals, local businesses and community groups, feedback was actively sought on ideas regarding the form that the community benefit scheme should take and how best to achieve maximum potential benefit for the local area from the community funding that would be associated with this project.

A significant community benefit fund will be available for the local area and should the project be developed under the RESS scheme, approximately €250,000 per year would be available for the local area for the duration of the scheme. The value of this fund will be directly proportional to the number of MWhs of electricity produced by the wind farm, on the project being successful in securing RESS support and the duration of that support.

## **Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) background**

### **RESS Community Benefit Fund**

Details were announced on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018 of the new Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) which is set to come into place by 2019. Renewable energy projects which are developed under this scheme will have a significantly increased community benefit fund associated with them and for wind energy this contribution is currently set at €2/MWhr. Based on the current layout and design, should the Dernacart Wind Farm be developed under RESS, it would attract a community contribution in the region of approx. €250,000/year for the local community for the lifetime this support. The value of this fund would be directly proportional to the level electricity generated on the wind farm. This would offer a significant opportunity in terms of bringing economic, environmental and social benefits to the local area. Feedback from the local community, which is set out below, highlighted a number of ways in which people felt this fund could be used to be of benefit locally.

### **RESS Community Investment Opportunity**

In addition to the significantly increased community benefit fund that will be associated with RESS projects, projects developed under the new scheme will also have a requirement to offer a community investment opportunity to people living in the local area. The details currently available on this set out the following:

- A community investment opportunity will be made available and open to anyone living within 10k of the proposed wind farm; and
- Priority will be given to people living within 5km of the proposed wind farm.

As part of our engagement with the local community, we have invited those living within the consultation area and who may be interested in the concept of investing in a wind farm and getting a return from it to contact us.

**Feedback form the local community in terms of Community Benefit:**

During the consultation process, feedback was sought in terms of how the community benefit fund could bring real and tangible benefits to the people living in the local area. 50 households provided feedback on how they felt that the community benefit fund should be used.

People were asked to consider some proposals being put forward for consideration (as outlined in the project booklet) whilst also being asked to propose their own thoughts on what the needs and requirements of the local area were along with areas that they felt could benefit from support in the local area.

The breakdown of the numbers of people supporting various aspects of community benefit were as follows:

Community Benefit Initiative	No. of people supporting
Direct return	42
Greener Living Scheme	31
Local Enterprise Initiative	19
Support for local community groups	18
Local Educational Fund	12
Greener Farming Scheme	3
Improved Broadband internet access	5

The overriding message that was received from people in the local area was that community benefit funds associated with this development should bring direct benefit to the houses in the local area. It was felt that this should be both in the form of a direct return from the wind farm whilst there was a strong appreciation for the need to take climate action and that the community benefit fund should assistance local households to reduce their carbon footprint.

**Greener Living Scheme**

During our consultation, the proposed wind farm was discussed in terms of the wider issue of climate change and fossil fuel dependency. It was well accepted in the local area that action needs to be taken on climate change in terms of developing renewable energy but also in terms of the changes that we will have to make as a society in the coming years in the way that we live. Encouragingly, a number of people expressed an interest or intention to carryout energy efficiency works to their properties which was a decision that they had arrived at before this project was being proposed. In one particular case, costings had been carried out on a deep retrofit however the total cost of this appeared to be quite high. It was felt that the community benefit fund should assist those in the local community to adapt to the changes that will be required in the transition to becoming a low carbon society and assist people who would like to reduce their carbon footprint.

In response to this feedback, we have proposed a Greener Living Scheme which will help people in this regard. The Greener Living Scheme would make grants available for people who wish to reduce their carbon footprint. In many instances this will be associated with lower overall energy bills into the future. The Greener Living Scheme will support local households that want to adopt low carbon solutions such as:

- Converting to low carbon home heating solutions such as heat pumps
- Increasing the BER rating of their property
- Carrying out energy efficiency works to their homes
- Installation of wiring for Electric vehicle charging
- Support for those who would like to buy an Electric Vehicle
- Support for local people who may have the opportunity to increase their ability to work from home

### **Direct return**

Feedback from people in the local area showed that people felt strongly that those living closest to the wind farm should benefit directly from the project. This is a concept that we support in principle and a concept which the DCCAE have indicated should get priority within the community benefit obligations of the new RESS schemes. The exact form that this direct return will take will be subject to any criteria set out in the final RESS scheme and will require further consultation with the local community however, it would be envisaged that the principle of providing a direct return mechanism for all houses that are located out as far as 1.4km from a constructed turbine, could benefit from a direct payment from the wind farm.

### **Barrow Bridge area public lighting**

Feedback from people living in the area of the barrow bridge highlighted that there has been a local aspiration to develop street lighting along the public road. In principle, should this still be a desire when the community benefit fund would come into place, Dernacart wind farm could provide funding that would assist with making this possible.

### **Lowering the carbon footprint of Mountmellick**

Some people expressed an interest in developing initiatives that would assist the greater urban area, along with the rural community, to lower its carbon footprint. Initial thoughts were that the community benefit fund could be used to develop a community led renewable energy project which would generate the equivalent electricity needs of the greater local area. Whilst there are many aspects of this concept to consider, Dernacart wind farm would welcome the opportunity to provide assistance to the local community should they decide to explore the possibility of developing a community led solar or wind energy project as suggested. If this concept had sufficient local support and it was seen to be feasible and of benefit to the local area, any request for funding from the community for financial assistance from the community benefit fund would be viewed as being acceptable in principle.

### **Administration of the Community Benefit Fund**

During our consultation we asked people how they felt the fund should be administered. The overwhelming feedback on this was that the community should have an input into how the fund would be administered. It was generally accepted that the wind farm owners and operators would have an interest in the administration and governance of the fund given that they would be providing these finances. Consultation with the local authority would have a role to play also in order to ensure efficient coordination of proposed schemes. It was felt that the local community should have an input on how the fund would be used to bring real and tangible benefits to the local area.

### **Summation on Public Consultation**

Publicly available, full, clear and comprehensive information has been made available about the project at all key stages and consultation has been carried out in an open, transparent and honest manner whilst promoting active and engaging two-way communication.

Consultation was commenced at an early stage in the development process and feedback was actively sought on the proposed wind farm. The design process incorporated the feedback received and changes were made to take account of local views where appropriate.

At all stages of the community engagement process, contact details in the form of a contact phone number and email address for enquiries were distributed. These were included on the project information booklets, newsletters and the project website. A contact and feedback facility are also included on the Project Website. Leading on from this consultation approach, the CLO has become well-known in the area and has worked to foster good relations in the local community. There was good engagement from the local community and much constructive feedback was received both on the design and community benefit aspects of the project. Most people engaged in this process advising how they felt that the proposal could be improved and how the community benefit fund could be used to bring real benefits to the local area. A copy of the public consultation information is included as Appendix 5.3 of this EIAR.

## 5.5 Key Issues Raised During Consultation

### Key issues raised during public consultation

During our one to one meetings with people in the local community as part of our consultation process, people were actively encouraged to provide feedback on the areas of concern that they had in terms of the proposed development. The preliminary design was reviewed in order to reflect consultation responses commonly received from the local public. Areas that we received queries on included potential shadow flicker, set back distances and proximity to houses and noise. The use of local roads also featured as a common query and a commitment was made to ensure that certain local roads would not be used during the course of construction.

### Feedback on Shadow Flicker

A number of people raised an initial concern regarding shadow flicker but were reassured from the outset that there will be no shadow flicker at properties in the area.

### Feedback on proximity & set back distances

A number of people raised initial queries regarding the setback distance between turbines and houses in the local area. The design proposal presented during consultation detailing a 740m set back from the nearest house not involved with the wind farm was generally acknowledged as an acceptable set back.

### Feedback on traffic management

Traffic management was raised on a number of occasions during the consultation process. These queries related to the use of local roads during the construction process and concerns that increased traffic volumes could make it more difficult or potentially dangerous particularly during the school run times. Feedback was taken into consideration during a review of the project which led directly to two local roads being prohibited from use during the construction period. This design change resulted directly from local feedback to our community liaison team.

### Feedback on Visuals

As is the case in most communities, people's thoughts on how wind turbines look ranged from those who like to the look of wind turbines and see them as a beacon of hope for the future, to those who have a negative view on them and don't like the look of them. The people who don't like the visual aspect of turbines raised this as a concern stating that they did not like to look of wind turbines in the landscape. This said, there were a number of these people who acknowledged that the screening in the area would mitigate against the visual impact. It was also acknowledged by a number of people that whilst they didn't particularly like the look of wind turbines, they accepted that they had an important role to play in delivering effective climate action. It was generally accepted that the reduced number of turbines, increased set back and increased tip height struck a more appropriate balance in terms of the design of a viable project. The consultation team advised that photomontages would form part of the planning application and that they would have the chance to visualise the project once the design was complete and the planning application submitted for consideration.

Further details of the alternatives and design process are contained in Chapter 2: Needs and Alternatives.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Consultation was sought from a number of stakeholders, including Laois and Offaly County Councils, governmental departments, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOS) and telecommunications / aviation providers. Their comments and feedback were incorporated into the EIAR as identified.

Pre-planning consultation was held with Laois County Council to determine the key points relating to the proposed development. A pre-planning meeting was also held with Offaly County Council in relation to the grid connection. However, a planning application for the grid connection will be progressed separately.

Public consultation has been facilitated by having a dedicated Community Liaison Officer on the ground and by way of a booklet / newsletter drop to ensure that locals are made aware of the intent of the applicant to submit an application for the proposed development and to also provide details on means to engage in the design and EIAR process. A dedicated website has also been set up to further assist the open communication between the applicant and community through the iterative design process.

In terms of community benefit, based on the current layout and design, should the Dernacart Wind Farm be developed under RESS, it would attract a community contribution in the region of approx. €250,000/year for the local community for the lifetime of the scheme. Given the predicted changes in electricity generation over the coming years and the move away from peat in particular as a source of energy, this community benefit fund could become central to the future development and economic sustainability of the local area.

Observations and issues that arose during the scoping and consultation process have informed the design, assessment and mitigation measures proposed as part of this project. There has been a reduction in the quantum of turbines from 16 no. to eight no. and there is an increase in set-back from the closest residence not involved in the project from 500m to 740m and the elimination of shadow flicker at dwellings in the local area.

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