



CONSULTANTS IN ENGINEERING,
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE &
PLANNING

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT (EIAR) FOR THE PROPOSED BALLINAGREE WIND FARM

VOLUME 2 - MAIN EIAR CHAPTER 4 – POLICY

Prepared for: Ballinagree Wind DAC



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Core House, Pouladuff Road, Cork T12 D773, Ireland

T: +353 21 4964 133 | E: info@ftco.ie

CORK | DUBLIN | CARLOW

www.fehilytimoney.ie

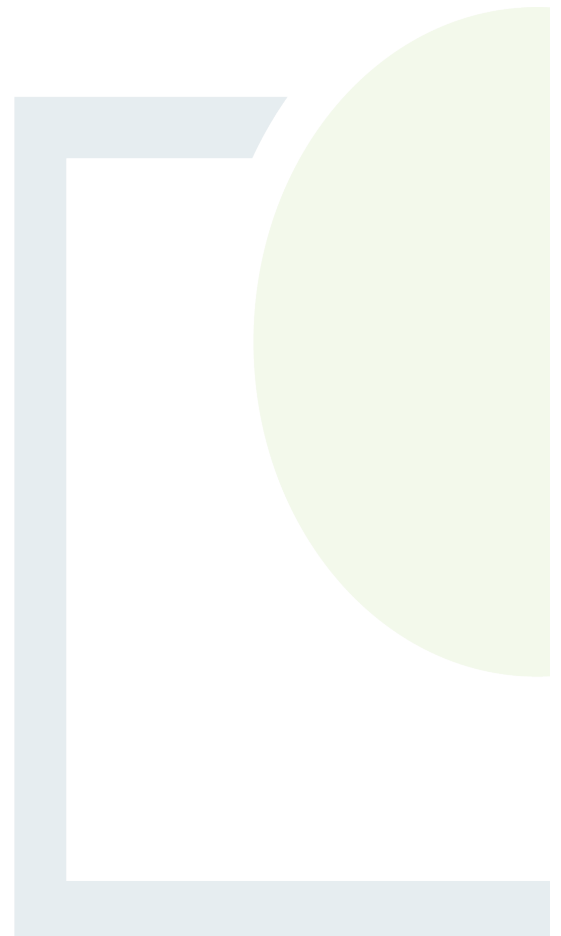


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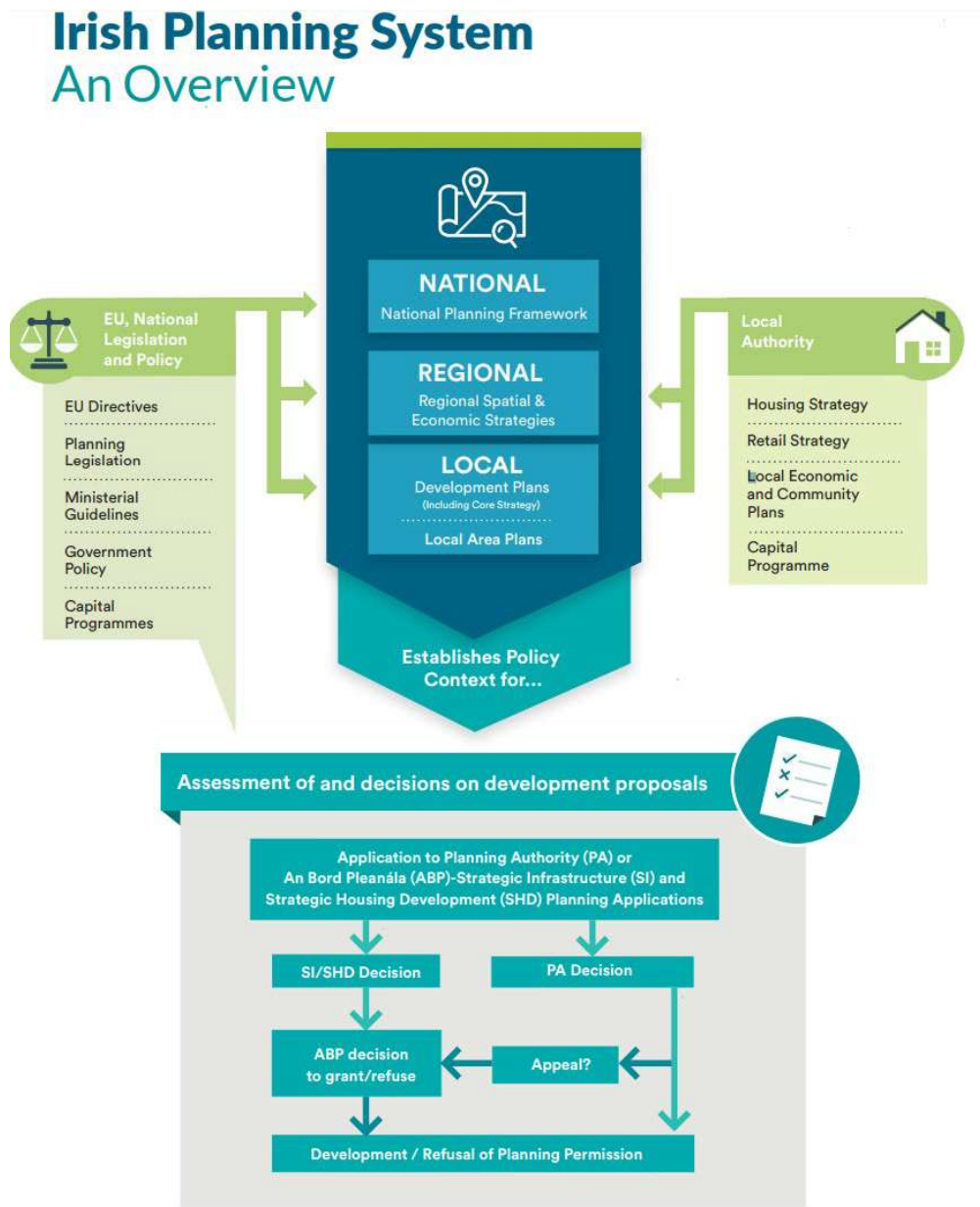


4 POLICY

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter of the EIAR outlines current EU, national, regional and local policy (where relevant) in combination with legislation relating to the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm Project.

The Irish Planning Policy system is set within a hierarchical structure, as identified in Figure 4-1. National policy is informed by EU Directives, Planning Legislation, Ministerial Guidelines, Government Policy and Capital programmes.





International and European legally binding agreements to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and to manage climate change internationally have been adopted into Ireland's National Energy Policy. This section of the EIA outlines how these legally binding agreements are being facilitated through national energy and climate policy with a clear mandate to support onshore wind energy development within the state. The importance in complying with the national energy policy at a local level cannot be overstated if Ireland is to achieve its national renewable energy targets.

The latest SEAI figures indicate that Ireland has not met its 2020 renewable energy targets with renewable electricity production approximately 8.5% below the 40% national target (SEAI, 2020a). Furthermore, the recent increase in renewable electricity targets to 80% by 2030 indicates the need for significant escalation in renewable energy production in Ireland. The following Chapter sets out how the proposed development complies with national and local energy policy and will contribute towards Ireland's national renewable energy targets.

4.2 International Global Policies

4.2.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty negotiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its ultimate objective was to achieve "... stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system (United Nations, 2013) " There are 195 parties ratified to the Convention and these are subdivided into Annex I, Annex II, Annex B, Non-Annex I and Least Developed Countries.

The Framework Convention specifies the aim of developed (Annex I) parties stabilising their greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide and other anthropogenic greenhouse gases not regulated under the Montreal Protocol) at 1990 levels, by the year 2000. The treaty did not set any limits or binding targets, instead, it provided a framework for negotiating specific international treaties ("protocols") that set binding limits on greenhouse gases. It does, however, require all parties in Annex 1 [Decision 3 CP.5] (of which the European Union 15 (EU 15) forms part of) to prepare and publish National Inventory Reports (NIRs) on emissions. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for the preparation of Ireland's NIR.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the highest body of the UNFCCC and consists of environment ministers who have met annually since 1995 to assess progress in dealing with the issue of climate change. At the Paris climate conference (COP21) in December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to limit the increase to 1.5°C. Under the agreement, Governments also agreed on the need for global emissions to peak as soon as possible, recognising that this will take longer for developing countries and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with the best available science.

The greater urgency with which the world is required to address climate change through ambitious targets was recently reflected in the publication of the sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ('IPCC') in August 2021. The overarching assertion is that , "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land".



This report confirms with alarming certainty the detrimental and linear relationship of CO2 emissions and global temperature rise, as set out in section in D1.1 of the report:

“This Report reaffirms with high confidence the AR5 finding that there is a near-linear relationship between cumulative anthropogenic CO2 emissions and the global warming they cause.....This relationship implies that reaching net zero anthropogenic CO2 emissions is a requirement to stabilize human-induced global temperature increase at any level, but that limiting global temperature increase to a specific level would imply limiting cumulative CO2 emissions to within a carbon budget.”

The detrimental effects of rising global temperatures are evidenced in regionally intensified weather patterns. Severe heat waves that happened only once every 50 years are now happening roughly once a decade. Tropical cyclones are getting stronger. Most land areas are seeing more rain or snow fall in a year. Severe droughts are happening 1.7 times as often while fire seasons are getting longer and more intense. COP 26 was held in November 2021, where the Glasgow Climate Pact was agreed. The pact agrees to focus on the terms of the Paris Agreement and for the first time there was an explicit agreement to reduce use of fossil fuels including Coal.

In this regard the Government enacted the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which provides for the approval of plans by the Government in relation to climate change for the purpose of pursuing the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy. These national plans and policies have been further developed since and are detailed in Section 4.4 of this Chapter.

4.2.2 Kyoto Protocol

In 1997, at one of the COPs, the Kyoto Protocol which set legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in two commitment periods was established.

The first commitment period (2008 - 2012) applied to emissions of six main greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulphur hexafluoride (SF6)), and set targets for:

- A 5% overall reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases in developed countries.
- An average 8% reduction below 1990 levels within the EU.

The EU 15 and other European countries (some of which subsequently acceded to the EU) have individual GHG reduction and limitation targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

Together, these European countries committed to achieve an annual emission reduction of 456 Mt CO2-equivalent (CO2eq) below 1990 levels over the period 2008 to 2012 (European Environmental Agency 2010).

Ireland's contribution was a limit of 13% above 1990 greenhouse gas emission levels which corresponds to an average limit of 62.8 million tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2eq) per annum during the period 2008 – 2012. Countries not fulfilling their obligations will be forced to purchase carbon credits on an open market from compliant countries.



The second commitment period applied to emissions from 2013 - 2020. All members of the European Union had binding targets in the second commitment period.

The EU 27 countries committed to reduce their GHG emissions by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels and to increase this commitment to a 30% reduction if other major emitting countries agree to similar targets under a global climate agreement.

Developing countries do not have binding targets under the Kyoto Protocol, but are still committed under the treaty to reduce their emissions. Actions taken by developed and developing countries to reduce emissions include support for renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and reducing deforestation.

One of the key mechanisms introduced under the Kyoto Protocol is the international emissions trading scheme which allows developed countries to trade their commitments. They can trade emissions quotas among themselves and can also receive credit for financing emissions reductions in developing countries.

The EU Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) came into operation on 1 January 2005 and was introduced to facilitate Member States achieve their commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective way. It is the largest such scheme in the world and allows participants to buy or sell emission allowances which means that emission cuts can be achieved at least at cost.

The EU ETS is a 'cap and trade' scheme, in that it caps the overall level of emissions allowed but, within that limit, allows participants in the scheme to buy and sell allowances as they require.

These allowances are the common trading 'currency' at the heart of the scheme. One allowance gives the holder the right to emit one tonne of CO₂ or the equivalent amount of another greenhouse gas (CO₂eq).

The categories of activity covered by the EU ETS are set out in Annex 1 of the principal Directive (2003/87/EC) and the greenhouse gases to which the Scheme applies to are set out in Annex II of the same Directive. While all six gases listed in Annex A of the Kyoto Protocol are included in Annex II, not all are in practical terms actually covered by the ETS and the listing of all in Annex II is perhaps a signal of the intention to extend the scheme in the future.

The Scheme operates in periodic cycles that have come to be known as 'phases' as the EU ETS scheme is open ended with no termination date specified. Phase 1 ran from 2005 - 2007 and was known as the commitment period, Phase 2 covered 2008 -2012 (the Kyoto Phase) and Phase 3 extends from 2013 – 2020 and this phase ties in with the EU Commissions end date of 31 December 2020 for its own reduction in greenhouse gases.

Phase 4 runs from 2021-2030 and aims to improve the ETS as part of a revision to the ETS Directive concluded in 2018, to achieve the EU's 2030 emission reduction targets in line with the 2030 climate and energy policy framework and as part of the EU's contribution to the 2015 Paris Agreement (EU, 2019). The legislation governing the auctions of emission allowances required to be changed to take into account new rules agreed as part of the 2018 revision of the ETS Directive. The changes concern in particular the use of the common auction platform to monetise the allowances dedicated to the Innovation and Modernisation Fund. This phase will include a reduced emissions allowance at an annual rate of 2.2%, up from 1.74%, increasing each nation's need to cut emissions on an annual basis.

Further changes proposed for the ETS commenced in 2013 through Directive 2009/29/EC. In summary Member states, will no longer draw up National Allocation Plans (NAPs) – instead, there will be a single EU-wide cap and allowances will be allocated on the basis of harmonised rules amongst other changes to the trading period etc.



4.3 EU Directives and Policies

This section summarises the previous policies and targets for renewable energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Europe up to 2020 in order to provide context and establish the progress made in Ireland over the past two decades to achieve these EU targets. The section then details the latest policies and targets with a view of 2030 and beyond. The various directives and policies of the EU set a clear mandate for each member state to transition to sustainable, renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is reflected in the theme of European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen’s inaugural ‘State of the Union’ address delivered on 16 September 2020 which emphasised the need to transform the European economy and society to deal with the climate change emergency. It was also stated that the EU aims to reduce the EU’s net greenhouse gas emission by at least 55% on 1990 levels by the end of this decade.

4.3.1 European Union Targets for 2020 and the Irish Context

The year 2020 was a significant milestone for renewable energy and emissions targets in the Europe. The EU Directive on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources (2009/28/EC) set a target of 20% of EU energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020 and a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, the so-called 20:20:20 plan.

As part of this Directive, Ireland’s overall national target for the share of energy from renewable sources in gross final consumption of energy in 2020 was 16% (increased from 3.1% in 2005). For renewable electricity alone, Ireland has set a national target of 40% by 2020 as outlined in the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP). The sectoral components of the overall 16% target are detailed in Table 4-1, which outlines each form of renewable energy supply (RES). The current share of renewable energy in these components is also presented. The latest figures from SEAI detail the 2019 share of renewable energy.

Table 4-1 demonstrates that Ireland has made significant progress in achieving its 2020 renewable electricity targets. Wind energy accounted for 32% of all electricity generated in 2019, the largest contributor of renewable electricity in Ireland.

Table 4-1: Target and Current Share of Renewable Energy in Energy Sectors

Form of Renewable Energy Supply	2018 Position (SEAI, 2020)	2019 Position (SEAI, 2020a)	Target Share For 2020
Electricity (RES-E)	33.2%	36.5%	40%
Heat (RES-H)	6.5%	6.3%	12%
Transport (RES-T)	7.2%	8.9%	10%

Source: SEAI (2020), Renewable Energy in Ireland 2020 Update & SEAI (2020a), Energy in Ireland 2020 Report

In 2008, the EU agreed a climate and energy package that included a target to reduce GHG emissions across the EU by 20% below 1990 levels by the year 2020. This resulted in two pieces of European legislation focusing on reduction in GHG emissions. Directive 2009/29/EC requiring ETS companies to reduce their emissions by 21% below 2005 levels by 2020; and Decision 406/2009/EC requiring Ireland to reduce non-ETS emissions by 20% below 2005 levels by 2020.



According to SEAI (2020a), Ireland achieved approximately 14.6% reduction in GHG emissions compared to 2005 levels. This included an approximate 23% reduction in GHG emissions in the energy sector, indicating renewable energy's significant contribution to the overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland.

Although the final 2020 figures for Renewable Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions are not available at the time of preparing this Chapter, it is demonstrated by the progress made towards the 2020 targets as detailed in Table 4-1 that renewable sources of energy have contributed greatly to the achievement of Ireland's energy and emissions targets as set by the EU. This places Ireland in a strong position to continue this progress towards 2030 EU targets, as detailed in the following sections.

4.3.2 2030 Climate and Energy Framework

In October 2014 EU leaders adopted the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework (European Commission, 2014) which was subsequently updated in 2018. The framework provides a long term perspective beyond 2020 targets. The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework sets out three key targets for the year 2030:

- At least 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels)
- At least 32% share of renewable energy
- At least 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency.

Further to this the European Commission in 2016 published its 2030 emissions targets break down for each Member State. While the overall EU target is a reduction of 40% on 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, every Member State negotiates an individual target. Ireland will have to reduce its emissions by 30% relative to its 2005 emissions.

Ireland will have 4% one-off flexibility from emissions trading, at the highest end of the ranking. Ireland will have 5.6% flexibility from land use. This is a substantially larger margin than any other Member State except Latvia.

4.3.3 A Roadmap for Moving to a Competitive Low Carbon Economy in 2050

Looking beyond 2020 in compliance with the EC Energy Roadmap 2050, an EU target of at least 27% has been indicated as the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU in 2030. While the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) is currently examining the potential for diversifying Ireland's renewable technology mix in the post-2020 period, the Department recognises in the Roadmap that; "as a proven and cost effective technology, onshore wind will remain part of Ireland's generation portfolio out to 2030 and will help to meet Ireland's contribution to the binding EU-wide 2030 renewable energy target". The Roadmap has informed national policy and has influenced the Climate Action Plan (2019) which sets out actions to reduce climate change towards 2050.

4.3.4 Clean Energy for all Europeans Package (2019)

In 2019 the EU overhauled its energy policy framework to tackle the transition towards clean energy and a carbon-neutral economy and to facilitate a clean and fair energy transition.



By providing a modern, stable legal environment and setting a clear and common sense of direction, the EU aims to stimulate the necessary public and private investment and bring European added value by addressing these challenges. As a package, the new rules will reinforce consumer rights, putting them at the heart of the energy transition and creating growth and green jobs in a modern economy. They will enable the EU to show leadership in the fight against climate change following the Paris Agreement.

The Clean energy for all Europeans package sets the right balance between making decisions at EU, national, and local level. Member States will continue to choose their own energy mix, but must meet new commitments to improve energy efficiency and the take-up of renewables in that mix by 2030. For example, the new rules on the electricity market, which have been adopted, will make it easier for renewable energy to be integrated into the grid, encourage more inter-connections and cross-border trade, and ensure that the market provides reliable signals for future investment. Member States are required to draft plans to prevent, prepare for and manage possible crisis situations in the supply of electricity in coordination with neighbouring Member States, and to enhance the role of the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators.

In December 2018, the recast Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001/EU entered into force, as part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package, aimed at keeping the EU a global leader in renewables and, more broadly, helping the EU to meet its emissions reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement.

The need to transform the European economy and society to deal with the climate change emergency was a defining theme of European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen's inaugural 'State of the Union' address delivered on 16 September 2020. The Commission has also indicated an intention to adopt the increased target of 55% as the EU's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement by the end of 2020. As well as the target being given legislative force in the EU through the proposed EU Climate Law, it will oblige all EU institutions across all areas of competence, and the Member States, to work collectively to achieve the target of 55%.

4.3.5 Recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED2)

In June 2018, an agreement was made in Europe between negotiators for the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council with regard to increasing renewable energy use in Europe.

The new regulatory framework includes a binding renewable energy target for the EU for 2030 of 32% with an upwards revision clause by 2023. This agreement will help the EU meet the Paris Agreement goals. In terms of renewable energy production, the agreement has achieved:

- A new, binding EU renewable energy target of 32% by 2030, including a review clause by 2023 for an upward revision of the EU level target;
- Improved design and stability of renewable energy support schemes.

The revised renewable energy Directive 2018/2001/EU entered into force in December 2018.



4.3.6 European Green Deal (December, 2019)

The European Green Deal is a growth strategy for the EU which aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, improving quality of life with modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. The EU aim to do this by becoming climate-neutral by 2050.

With regard to the supply of clean, affordable and secure energy, the European Green Deal underlines the fact that in order to meet the EU's climate and sustainability goals, all sectors must increase their use of renewable energy and phase out fossil fuels.

The EU aim to increase the greenhouse gas emission reductions targets for 2030 to at least 50% and towards 55%, compared to 1990 levels, in order to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. A key principle for achieving this will be to develop a power sector based largely on renewable resources.

4.4 National Policies

National energy and climate policy is derived from the overarching European Policy which aims to unify the European Union in energy and climate goals. The following section sets out the relevant national policies which will influence the development of the country in the coming decades with respect to energy production, carbon neutrality and climate change mitigation.

These policies are supported by the latest Programme for Government (2020) 'Our Shared Future' which presents strong climate governance in rapidly reducing climate change in order to protect and improve public health and quality of life. The government are committed to rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector with an aim of providing the necessary actions to deliver national renewable electricity targets. In line with the European Green Deal (2019), The Programme for Government sets out the Government's commitment to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 (DoECC, 2020). These government ambitions support the ongoing generation of renewable energy from on-shore wind sources, as detailed in the following section.

4.4.1 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act was published in January 2016 by the then Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Act sets out the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period up to and including the year 2050. The Act provides for a solid statutory foundation to the institutional arrangements necessary to enable the State to pursue and achieve the "national transition objective".

While there are no explicit targets set out within the Act itself, the legislation obliges the State to take into account any existing obligations of the State under the law of the European Union or any international agreement. In effect, the Act formally obliges the State to adhere to EU targets. The other major feature of the Act is the establishment of an expert advisory council which will advise and make recommendations to the Minister for the Environment.



The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act has paved the way for national policy support for renewable energy generation and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as set out in the following sections.

4.4.2 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, signed into law 23rd July 2021, is an Act to provide for the approval of plans by the Government in relation to climate change for the purpose of pursuing the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by the end of the year 2050.

It will establish a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law, and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure we achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term. The Act amends the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to significantly strengthen the framework for governance of climate action by the State in order to realise our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations.

The Act embeds the process of carbon budgeting into law, the Government is required to adopt a series of economy-wide five-year carbon budgets, including sectoral targets for each relevant sector, on a rolling 15-year basis, starting in 2021. This includes a provision for the first two five-year carbon budgets to equate to a total reduction of 51% emissions over the period to 2030, in line with the programme for Government which commits to a 7% average yearly reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade, and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. This Act will drive implementation of a suite of policies to help us achieve this goal.

The Act also requires for all Local Authorities to prepare individual Climate Action Plans which will include both mitigation and adaptation measures, representing a mandate for Local Authorities to adapt to climate change.

4.4.3 Climate Action Plan (2021)

The Government published a Climate Action Plan (CAP) in June 2019. The CAP resulted from the Irish Government declaring a climate and biodiversity emergency on 9th May 2019. The CAP identifies how Ireland will achieve its 2030 targets for carbon emissions throughout various sectors with a number of actions. The CAP is fundamental in implementing the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. A new updated CAP was published in November 2021 which updates the targets for renewable energy by 2030 from the previous 70% to now 80% target. Similar to the 2019 Plan the target is to be achieved by essentially doubling Ireland's onshore wind energy capacity to 8 GW by 2030.

To achieve this target the Plan deems it necessary to "Ensure supportive spatial planning framework for onshore renewable electricity generation development " (Action 100) and to "Deliver regular Onshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auctions that aligns with spatial and planning policy and efficient use of network" (Action 102).

Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) was first submitted to the European Commission on the 31st December 2018. It outlines Ireland's energy and climate policies in detail. The NECP is a consolidated plan which brings together energy and climate planning into a single process for the first time. The NECP 2021 – 2030 was updated and published in June 2021. The 2021 publication was prepared to incorporate all planned policies and measures that were identified up to the end of 2019 (including the Climate Action Plan 2019) and which collectively deliver a 30% reduction by 2030 in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions (from 2005 levels).



Under the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future, Ireland is committed to achieving a 7% annual average reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 2021 and 2030. The NECP was drafted in line with the current EU effort-sharing approach, before the Government committed to this higher level of ambition, and therefore does not reflect this higher commitment. Ireland is currently developing those policies and measures and intends to integrate the revision of the NECP into the process which will be required for increasing the overall EU contribution under the Paris Agreement.

4.4.4 EU Governance Regulation and Ireland’s National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP)

Under the EU Governance Regulation, Member States had to submit their 2021-2030 draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP’s) by the end of 2018 and final plans by the end of 2019. The Commission has assessed these both at EU and Member State level. Member States will also need to update their NECPs by the end of June 2023 in a draft form and by 30 June 2024 in a final form in order to reflect an increased ambition. Member States are required to report on the progress made in implementing their energy and climate policies, including their NECPs, for the first time in March 2023 and every two years thereafter. The Governance Regulation is effectively the piece of EU legislation under which Ireland is held accountable in meeting its de-carbonisation targets.

It is important to note that Article 4 of the Regulation sets out specific trajectory requirements for renewable energy share in key intermediate years of 2022, 2025 and 2027. The final version of Ireland’s first NECP published in 2020 sets out specific annual targets for delivery of onshore and offshore wind in order to meet the requirements of Article 4. These intermediate targets will be particularly difficult to deliver and will require early deployment of onshore wind in particular, as the legislative framework underpinning offshore wind is still under development. The minimum target for onshore wind in Ireland by 2025 is a total installed capacity of 5900MW, an increase of approximately 1700MW in the next 4 years. This would need to increase substantially if there is any delay in the delivery of offshore wind in this timeframe. Given the timelines for grid offer processing, financing and construction, which can only commence after a successful grant of planning permission, the delivery of this 2025 intermediate target will depend entirely on the scale of projects consented in the next 1-2 years.

It should be noted that under the Programme for Government, ‘Our Shared Future’, Ireland is committed to achieving a 7% annual average reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 2021 and 2030. The NECP was drafted in line with the current EU effort-sharing approach, before the Government committed to this higher level of ambition, and therefore does not reflect this higher commitment. Ireland is currently developing those policies and measures and intends to integrate the revision of the NECP into the process which will be required for increasing the overall EU contribution under the Paris Agreement.

4.4.5 Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework

As a strategic development framework, Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework, demonstrates an approach that joins up ambition for improvement across the different areas of our lives, bringing the various government departments, agencies, State owned enterprises and local authorities together behind a shared set of strategic objectives for rural, regional and urban development.

“The National Planning Framework is a planning framework to guide development and investment over the coming years.



It does not provide every detail for every part of the country; rather it empowers each region to lead in the planning and development of their communities, containing a set of national objectives and key principles from which more detailed and refined plans will follow.”

The Framework sets out the key goals and objectives for the State, and central to this framework is the theme of Realising Our Sustainable Future. In particular, the Framework notes in Section 9.2: Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Low Carbon Economy that:

“Our transition to a low carbon energy future requires:

- A shift from predominantly fossil fuels to predominantly renewable energy sources;
- Increasing efficiency and upgrades to appliances, buildings and systems;
- Decisions around development and deployment of new technologies relating to areas such as wind, smart grids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy; and
- Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a low carbon economy.”

The NPF is supported by a series of National Strategic Outcomes which the Framework seeks to deliver. The purpose of the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) is to create a single vision, through a shared set of goals for every community across the country. The most pertinent outcomes in the context of the proposed renewable energy development are as follows:

National Strategic Outcome 3: Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities,

National Strategic Outcome 6: A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills,

National Strategic Outcome 8: Transition to Sustainable Energy.

A series of National Policy Objectives (NPOs) were developed to set the context for regional and local planning policy in Ireland. In the context of the proposed development, the following NPOs are considered the most relevant:

Table 4-2: National Policy Objectives (NPOs) from Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework

Policy Objective	Description
National Policy Objective 15	Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
National Policy Objective 21	Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services, including ICT based industries and those addressing climate change and sustainability.



Policy Objective	Description
National Policy Objective 23	Facilitate the development of the rural economy through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.
National Policy Objective 52	The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the requirements of all relevant environmental legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.
National Policy Objective 54	Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.
National Policy Objective 55	Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050.

Section 1.2: Making the Vision a Reality, recognises the need for new energy systems and transmission grids in order to deliver a more distributed, renewable focused national energy system in order to harness the potential from wind, wave and solar energy sources.

“The National Climate Policy Position establishes the national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

This objective will shape investment choices over the coming decades in line with the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework. New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables-focused energy generation system, harnessing both the considerable on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand.”

With regard to planning and investment for rural locations, Section 5.4: Planning and Investment to Support Rural Job Creation, recognises the key role of energy production in assisting in the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages to create and sustain vibrant rural communities.

“Rural areas have significantly contributed to the energy needs of the country and will continue to do so, having a strong role to play in securing a sustainable renewable energy supply. In planning Ireland’s future energy landscape and in transitioning to a low carbon economy, the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies is essential. Innovative and novel renewable energy solutions have been delivered in rural areas over the last number of years, particularly from solar, wind and biomass energy sources.”



4.4.6 Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2018 - 2027

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP) published in February 2018, in tandem with the National Planning Framework (NPF), seeks to drive Ireland’s long term economic, environmental and social progress over the next decade, in accordance with the spatial planning context of the NPF.

The key role of the NDP is to set out the updated configuration for public capital investment over the next 10 years in order to achieve the National Strategic Outcomes as set out within the NPF.

The NDP outlines a number of key energy initiatives, that set out to diversify our energy resources, and to assist in the transition towards a decarbonised society.

The NDP further emphasises National Strategic Outcome 8: Transition to Sustainable Energy, noting that:

“Ireland’s energy system requires a radical transformation in order to achieve its 2030 and 2050 energy and climate objectives. This means that how we generate energy and how we use it, has to fundamentally change. This change is already underway with the increasing share of renewables in our energy mix and the progress we are making on energy efficiency.

Investment in renewable energy sources, ongoing capacity renewal, and future technology affords Ireland the opportunity to comprehensively decarbonise our energy generation. By 2030, peat and coal will no longer have a role in electricity generation in Ireland. The use of peat will be progressively eliminated by 2030 by converting peat power plants to more sustainable low-carbon technologies.”

In achieving a Low-Carbon, Climate Resilient Society, the NDP outlines a New Renewable Electricity Support Scheme to support up to 4,500 megawatts of additional renewable electricity by 2030. It is considered that such schemes, in conjunction with greater investment in renewable energy, diversity of supply, and increased utilisation and adoption of electricity storage, will significantly assist in promoting a low-carbon, less energy intensive supply.

4.4.7 Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections, 2018 - 2040

The National Climate Change Strategy designated the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with responsibility for developing annual national emission projections for greenhouse gases for all key sectors of the economy, including transport. The EPA publishes greenhouse gas emission projections on an annual basis and submits emission projections to the Commission as required under Monitoring Mechanism Regulation 525/2013.

The EPA’s publication entitled *Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections (2019)* provides an updated assessment of Ireland’s projected greenhouse gas emissions out to 2040 which includes an assessment of progress towards achieving its emission reduction targets to 2030 set down under the EU Effort Sharing Decision (Decision No 406/2009/EC). Ireland’s 2020 target was to achieve a 20% reduction of non-Emission Trading Scheme (non-ETS) sector emissions (i.e. agriculture, transport, the built environment, waste and non-energy intensive industry) on 2005 levels with annual binding limits set for each year beyond 2020. 2030 targets for EU Member States were adopted by the European Council in 2018. Ireland’s 2030 target under the Effort Sharing Regulation is a 30% reduction of emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030. There will be binding annual limits over the 2021-2030 period to meet that target.



During its operation, the estimated range of between 361 and 404 GWh per year of electricity produced by the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm would be sufficient to supply between approximately 86,000 and 96,000 Irish households with electricity per year, based on the average Irish household using 4.2 MWh of electricity (this figure is available from the March 2017 CER Review of Typical Consumption Figures Decision). Thus, this energy will be used to offset the same amount of energy that would otherwise be generated from burning of fossil fuels at power stations.

It is estimated that between approximately 132,414 and 148,125 tonnes of CO₂ per annum will be offset due to the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm.

As a result, the operational stage of the proposed wind farm will have a significant long-term positive impact on air quality and climate change, in line with policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level.

Further details relating to the positive effects of the proposal on air quality and climate change are included in Chapter 6 of this EIA.

4.4.8 National Policy Conclusion

The development of the Ballinagree Wind Farm is in support of national policy as set out above. The project supports the enhancement of the competitiveness of rural areas and facilitates the development and diversification of the rural economy by supporting the energy sector and increasing the share of renewables in Ireland's energy mix.

The proposed development contributes to the nation's target increase of renewable energy from 30% to 80% by 2030 and supports the doubling of onshore wind energy in Ireland by 2030 as set out in the Climate Action Plan 2021.

The project supports national targets of climate change mitigation and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions where significant focus has been set out in the recent Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. The ambitious new programme for government is prioritising carbon neutrality and renewable energy generation. In light of this, it is important for the nation to rely on proven technologies such as on shore wind in order to meet the near-term objectives, as well as long-term objectives.

In 2021 the EPA published 'The Status of Ireland's Climate 2020', which demonstrates that the country is becoming warmer and wetter while sea levels and greenhouse emissions are rising. Extreme weather events, such as droughts and wet spells, are becoming more frequent and lasting longer, and already detrimentally impacting our ecosystem, crops and coastlines. The urgency with which Ireland and the rest of the world need to tackle climate breakdown is clear and reflected in our national targets, with the energy sector a key component in reaching decarbonization.

The proposed project promotes the generation of renewable energy at appropriate locations and supports the achievement of a low carbon economy by 2050. It is therefore considered that the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm is in line with national policy and supports the achievement of national energy and sustainability targets.



4.5 Regional Policies

4.5.1 Southern Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

The Southern Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) came into effect on 31st January 2020. The RSES sets out a strategy to implement the NPF at a regional level. The RSES sets out a strategic vision which includes actions to mitigate against climate change. The RSES recognises the urgency to transition to a low carbon future, accelerate the transition towards low carbon economy and increase the use of renewable energy sources across the key sectors of electricity supply, heating, transport and agriculture in order to safeguarding and enhance the region’s environment through sustainable development, prioritising action on climate change across the region, driving the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. The RSES states the following in relation to wind energy:

“Wind energy is currently the largest contributor of renewable energy and it has the potential to achieve between 11-16GW of onshore wind and 30GW of offshore wind by 2050 (SEAI, 2016). The sector can make a significant contribution to meeting national energy demands while attaining our energy and emissions targets for 2020 and beyond.”

The RSES includes a range of policy objectives which support the development of renewable energy projects such as the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm Project.

Objectives include the following:

Table 4-3: Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Objectives

Policy	Description
RPO 50	It is an objective to further develop a diverse base of smart economic specialisms across the rural Region, including innovation and diversification in (among other things) renewable energy as a dynamic driver for the rural economy.
RPO 56	The RSES recognises the urgency to transition to a low carbon future and it is therefore an objective to accelerate the transition towards low carbon economy and circular economy through mechanisms such as the Climate Action Competitive Fund;
RPO 95	It is an objective to support implementation of the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), and the Offshore Renewable Energy Plan and the implementation of mitigation measures outlined in their respective SEA and AA and leverage the Region as a leader and innovator in sustainable renewable energy generation.
RPO 99	It is an objective to support the sustainable development of renewable wind energy (on shore and offshore) at appropriate locations and related grid infrastructure in the Region in compliance with national Wind Energy Guidelines.



The development of the Ballinagree Wind Farm will aid in meeting the objectives set out in the RSES including diversification of the rural economy, actions against climate change and the sustainable development of wind energy at an appropriate location.

4.6 Local Policy

4.6.1 Cork County Development Plan 2014

It is a specific planning policy requirement under Section 28 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) that in making development plans a planning authority has regard to national policy on renewable energy as contained in the aforementioned policy documents.

A County Development Plan is required to indicate how the implementation of the development plan will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation. This applies in particular to wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource.

The Cork County Development Plan (CDP) 2014 sets out the strategic framework for land use planning in the county. Chapter 9 of the CDP sets out the energy strategy for the County with an aim to:

“Ensure that through sustainable development County Cork fulfils its optimum role in contributing to the diversity and security of energy supply and to harness the potential of the county to assist in meeting renewable energy targets.” (ED 1-1 Energy)

The most pertinent transposed policies and objectives are outlined in Table 4-4:

Table 4-4: Extracts from the Current County Council Development Plan (2014)

Policy / Objective	Description
Objective ED 3-1	National Wind Energy Guidelines - Development of on-shore wind shall be designed and developed in line with the ‘Planning Guidelines for Wind Farm Development 2006’ issued by DoELG and any updates of these guidelines.
Objective ED 3-2	<i>Wind Energy Projects - On-shore wind energy projects should focus on areas considered ‘Acceptable in Principle’ and Areas ‘Open to Consideration’ and generally avoid “Normally Discouraged” areas in this Plan.</i>
Objective ED 3-3	<i>Wind Energy Generation - Support a plan led approach to wind energy development in County Cork and identify areas for wind energy development. The aim in identifying these areas is to ensure that there are no significant environmental constraints, which could be foreseen to arise in advance of the planning process.</i>

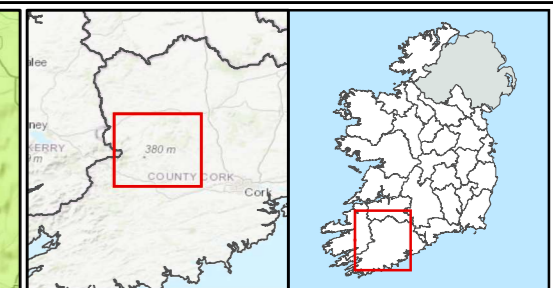
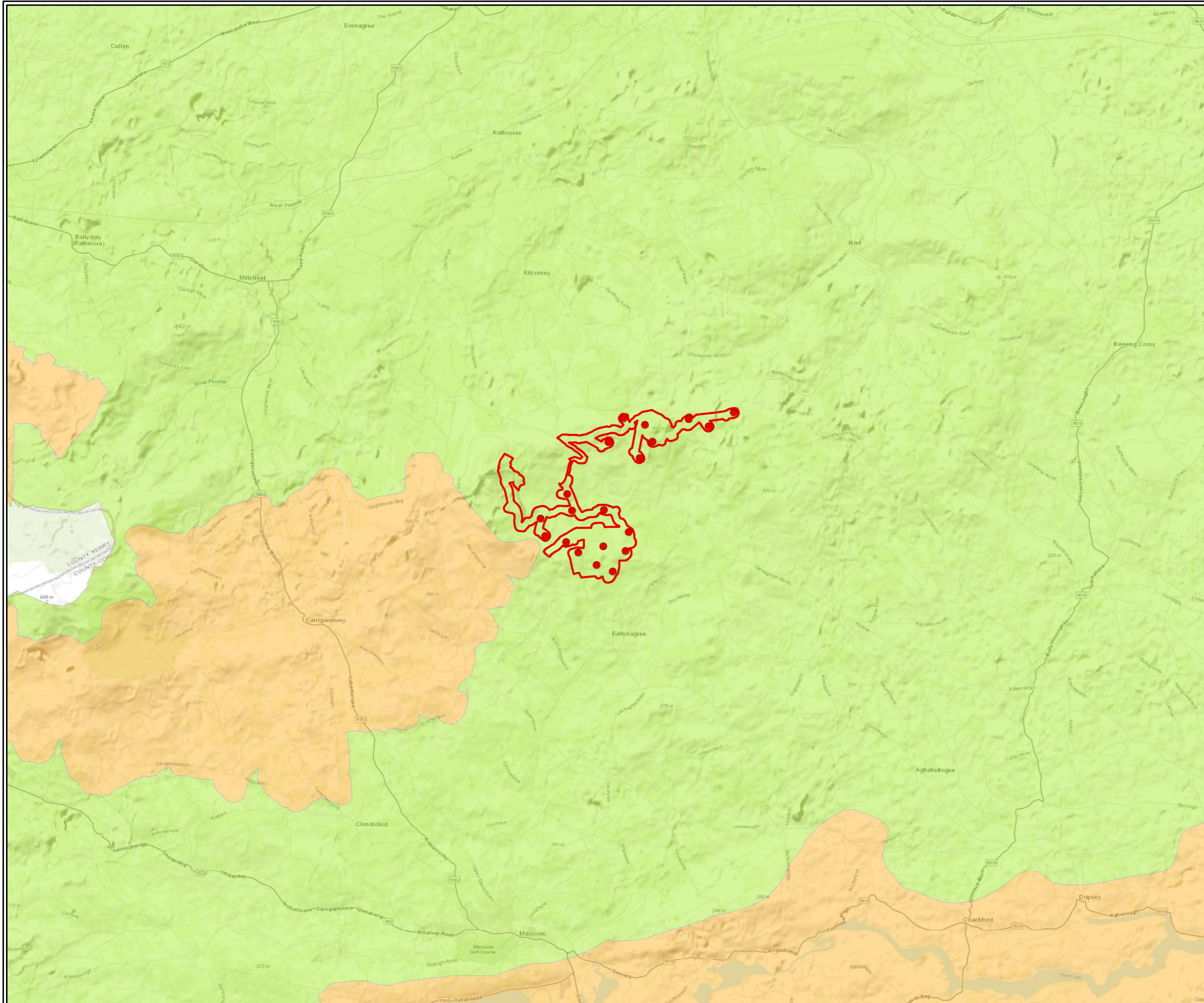


The on-shore wind energy strategy designations of the Cork County Development Plan as set out in figure 9.3 of the CDP places the site within an area identified as ‘**Open to Consideration**’ for wind energy development.

CDP Objective ED 3-5: **Open to Consideration** – “Commercial wind energy development is open to consideration in these areas where proposals can avoid adverse impacts on:

- Residential amenity particularly in respect of noise, shadow flicker and visual impact;
- Urban areas and Metropolitan/Town Green Belts;
- Natura 2000 Sites (SPA and SAC), Natural Heritage Areas (NHA’s) or adjoining areas affecting their integrity.
- Architectural and archaeological heritage;
- Visual quality of the landscape and the degree to which impacts are highly visible over wider areas.”

The Cork County Development 2014 is currently under review. The draft County Development Plan 2022-2028 was published in April 2021. Consultation closed on the 1st of July 2021 and the finalised development plan is expected to be adopted in 2022. The draft County Development Plan is further detailed in Section 4.6.3.




Legend

- Development Boundary
- Proposed Turbine Layout

Cork Wind Policy 2015

- Open to Consideration
- Normally Discouraged

TITLE:	Cork County Council Wind Energy Policy Areas		
PROJECT:	Ballinagree Wind Farm		
FIGURE NO:	4.2		
CLIENT:	Coillte and Ørsted		
SCALE:	1:100000	REVISION:	0
DATE:	09/12/2021	PAGE SIZE:	A3
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4.6.2 Cork County Development Plan 2014, Landscape Character Assessment

The site falls within three landscape character types as set out in the Cork County Development Plan Landscape Character Assessment. These areas are further detailed in the Cork County Draft Landscape Strategy 2007. The Plan states that the landscape strategy remains in Draft format until the National Landscape Strategy is published as it may require a comprehensive review of the Draft strategy.

Landscape Character Type 13a: Valleyed Marginal Middleground (Macroom and Environs)

This landscape type is found between Ballyvourney and Macroom. Topographically this landscape comprises low rounded hills of old red sandstone enclosing fairly broad undulating river valleys. The Draft County Landscape Strategy (2007) states, with respect to wind farms, that areas to the north east of Macroom around the area of Ballinagree “has been identified as being suitable for wind energy development”. According to Appendix E of the Cork CDP: Landscape Character Assessment, the landscape value and landscape sensitivity are considered to be high and is considered to be of county importance. The southern extent of the proposed development falls within this landscape character area.

Landscape Character Type 14b: Fissured Marginal and Forested Rolling Upland (Lyre and Nad)

The topography of this landscape is one of relatively steep but rolling mountainous upland, which is fissured, in places quite deeply, by narrow serpentine rivers but also which includes some broad flat ground. The Boggeragh Mountains are located in this area. The higher ground is part of a larger mountain range comprising old red sandstone and mudstone. The area is characterised by fast flowing rivers which fan outwards from the main upland mass in directions ranging from south-west to east-west. The Draft County Landscape Strategy (2007) states, with respect to wind farms that this area is not regarded as a “Strategic Search Area” or a “Strategically Unsuitable Area” for windfarm developments. The strategy states that “the visual impact of windfarm development in adjoining areas may become more prominent in the future”.

According to Appendix E of the Cork CDP: Landscape Character Assessment, the landscape value and landscape sensitivity are considered to be medium and is considered to be of local importance. The north eastern extent of the proposed development falls within this landscape character area.

Landscape Character Type 15b: Ridged and Peaked Upland

The ridged, peaked and forested upland landscape type which is located south of Millstreet town, includes much of the Millstreet to Macroom road (R582) and swings south west towards the county boundary west of Ballyvourney. This landscape type has been glaciated and comprises a fairly rugged and rolling mountainous topography at a relatively high elevation. The Draft County Landscape Strategy (2007) states, with respect to wind farms, that wind farms can be seen off in the distance from certain elevated views within this landscape type. While their presence is noted, their visual impact is not considered to be a major factor. However, an accumulation of more windfarms could have a more intolerable visual impact in the future. According to Appendix E of the Cork CDP: Landscape Character Assessment, the landscape value and landscape sensitivity are considered to be medium and is considered to be of County importance. The central section of the proposed development falls within this landscape character area.

The Landscape Character Area designations are illustrated in relation to the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm in figure 4-3.



Scenic Routes

The Cork CDP policy objective GI 7-2: Scenic Routes states the following:

“Protect the character of those views and prospects obtainable from scenic routes and in particular stretches of scenic routes that have very special views and prospects identified in this plan.”

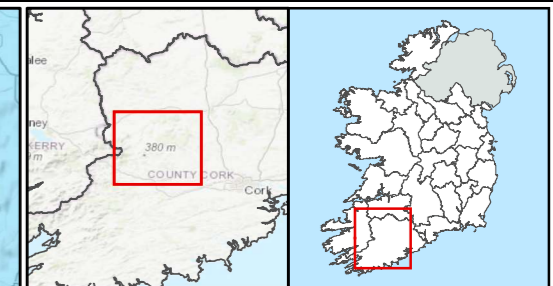
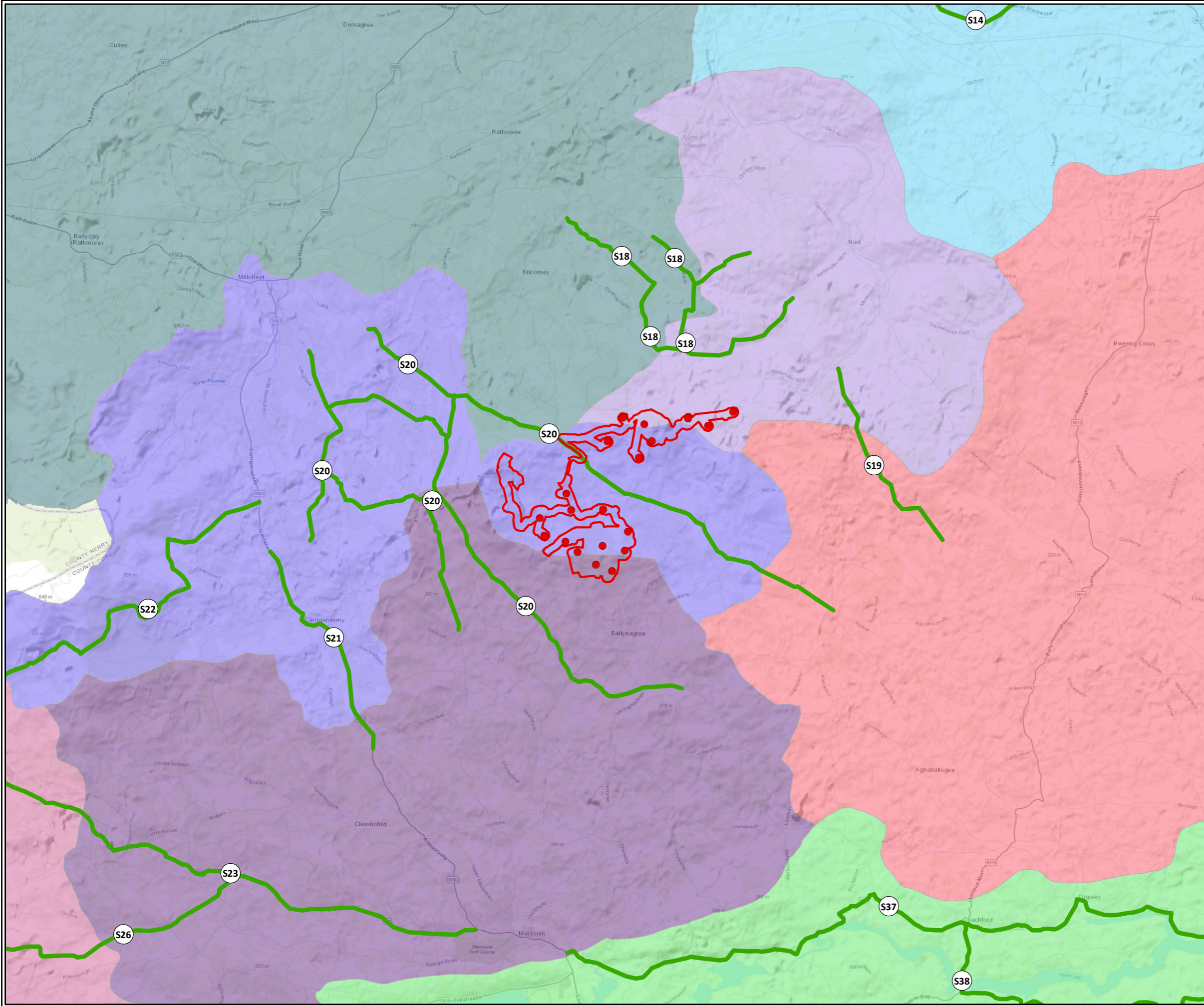
Three scenic routes are in proximity to the proposed development including one which traverses the proposed wind farm site.

Scenic Route S18 is located north of the site and consists of local mountain roads between Seefin and Nad. The route is designated for the views of the Boggeragh Mountains and distant views of the Caherbranagh and Derrynasagart Mountains. The overall landscape value of Route S18 is considered medium.

Scenic Route S19 is a regional road from Glenaknockane towards Bonoughmore. The route is designated for views of the Boggeragh Mountains and rural uplands. The overall landscape value of Route S19 is considered medium.

Scenic Route S20 consists of roads at Musherah in the Boggeragh Mountains and roads from Musherah to Ballynagree, Lackdoha and Rylane Cross. This route is largely located to the west of the site and includes a section to the south and a section which traverses the site along the L2758 ‘Butter Road’. The route is designated for the views of the Boggeragh Mountains, views of the Knocknagoun Mountains and remote rural landscape. The overall landscape value of Route S20 is considered medium to high.

Volume 2, Chapter 5 of the 2014 Cork CDP sets out details of each designated scenic route. Details of the relevant routes are included in table 4.5 and illustrated in figure 4.4. An assessment of the potential impact on these scenic routes is described in Chapter 15 - Landscape and Visual.



Legend

- Proposed Turbine Layout
- Development Boundary
- Scenic Routes

Landscape Character Types:

- Broad Marginal Middleground Valleys
- Fertile Plain with Moorland Ridge
- Fissured Fertile Middleground
- Fissured Marginal and Forested Rolling Upland
- Hilly River and Reservoir Valleys
- Ridged and Peaked Upland
- Rolling Marginal Middleground
- Valleyed Marginal Middleground

TITLE:	Landscape Character Areas and Scenic Routes		
PROJECT:	Ballinagree Wind Farm		
FIGURE NO:	4.3		
CLIENT:	Coillte and Ørsted		
SCALE:	1:100000	REVISION:	0
DATE:	09/12/2021	PAGE SIZE:	A3

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Table 4-5: Scenic Routes (Extract from Cork County Development Plan, Volume 2, Chapter 5)

Table 5.1 Scenic Routes – Views and Prospects & Scenic Route Profiles										
Scenic Route	Does Route Run Through or Adjoin High Value Landscape	Does the Route adjoin a NHA, pNHA, cSAC a SPA or pSPA	Landscape Type(s) Route Runs Through	Overall Landscape Value	Main Features of Land Cover	Description & General Views Being Protected	Structures of Historic or Cultural Importance Visible from Route	Key Characteristics of Land Use	Is There a Sense of Remoteness as you Travel the Route?	Rural Character
S18	No	SAC Blackwater River	Type 11 & Type 14b	Medium	Grass valleys, rough upland grazing, commercial forestry, Boggeragh Mts. & Owenbaun River Valley	Local Mountain roads between Seefin, Kilcorney & Nad Views of the Boggeragh Mountains & distant views of the Caherbranagh & Derrynasaggart Mountains	No Information Available	Subsistence farming & upland commercial forestry	Yes	Prevalent
S19	No	No	Type 14b & Type 10b Fissured Fertile Middle-ground	Medium	Rural landscape & mountainous rugged upland	R579 Regional Road from Glenaknockane towards Donoughmore Views of Boggeragh Mountains & rural uplands	Archaeological remains	Agriculture	Yes	Prevalent
S20	No	SAC Blackwater River & pNHA Boggeragh Mountains	Type 15b, Type 11, Type 10b, Type 13a	Medium (x3) - High	Mountains, extensive mountain valleys, lowlands, vegetation & settlement	Local Roads at Musherah in the Boggeragh Mountains and roads from Musherah to Ballynagree, Lackdotia and Rylane Cross. Views of and from the Boggeragh Mountains, views of the Knocknagoun Mountains & remote rural landscape	Duhallow Way, Kerryman's Table, Millstreet Country Park & megalithic material	Subsistence farming, commercial forestry, Millstreet Country Park & one-off housing	Yes	Prevalent



Relevant landscape policies in relation to the proposed development are listed in Table 4-6 below:

Table 4-6: Landscape Policies / Objectives Pertinent to the Proposed Development

Landscape Policy / Objective	Description
Objective GI 6-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect the visual and scenic amenities of County Cork’s built and natural environment. Landscape issues will be an important factor in all land use proposals, ensuring that a proactive view of development is undertaken while maintaining respect for the environment and heritage generally in line with the principle of sustainability Ensure that new development meets high standards of siting and design. Protect skylines and ridgelines from development. Discourage proposals necessitating the removal of extensive amounts of trees, hedgerows and historic walls or other distinctive boundary treatments.
Objective GI 6-2	<p>Ensure that the management of development throughout the County will have regard for the value of the landscape, its character, distinctiveness and sensitivity as recognised in the Cork County Draft Landscape Strategy and its recommendations, in order to minimize the visual and environmental impact of development, particularly in areas designated as High Value Landscapes where higher development standards (layout, design, landscaping, materials used) will be required.</p>
Objective GI 7-1	<p>Preserve the character of all-important views and prospects, particularly sea views, river or lake views, views of unspoilt mountains, upland or coastal landscapes, views of historical or cultural significance (including buildings and townscapes) and views of natural beauty as recognized in the Draft Landscape Strategy.</p>
Objective GI 7-2	<p>Protect the character of those views and prospects obtainable from scenic routes and in particular stretches of scenic routes that have very special views and prospects identified in this plan. The scenic routes identified in this plan are shown on the scenic amenity maps in the CDP Map Browser and are listed in Volume 2 Chapter 5 Scenic Routes of this plan.</p>
Objective GI 7-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require those seeking to carry out development in the environs of a scenic route and/or an area with important views and prospects, to demonstrate that there will be no adverse obstruction or degradation of the views towards and from vulnerable landscape features. In such areas, the appropriateness of the design, site layout, and landscaping of the proposed development must be demonstrated along with mitigation measures to prevent significant alterations to the appearance or character of the area. Encourage appropriate landscaping and screen planting of developments along scenic routes which provides guidance in relation to landscaping.

Having regard to objectives and policies pertaining to landscape, the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm is considered to be compliant with the CDP. Further details in relation to potential impacts on landscape are included in Chapter 15: Landscape and Visual.



4.6.3 Draft Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

The Draft Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028 was published in April 2021. Public consultation closed in July 2021 and the draft plan is expected to be adopted in 2022. Once adopted, this plan will replace the Cork County Development Plan 2014 as the main guiding planning policy for development within Cork County. The Draft Plan sets out policy and objectives relating to Energy and Climate Action.

In relation to Renewable Energy, the Draft Plan sets out objectives in Section 13 which supports the delivery of sustainable sources of energy. Relevant objectives are listed in Table 4-7:

Table 4-7: Objectives Pertinent to the Proposed Development – Draft County Development Plan

Landscape Policy / Objective	Description
Objective ET 13.1: Energy	Ensure that County Cork fulfils its potential in contributing to the sustainable delivery of a diverse and secure energy supply and to harness the potential of the county to assist in meeting renewable energy targets.
Objective ET 13.2: Renewable Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Support Ireland’s renewable energy commitments as outlined in Government Energy and Climate Change policies by facilitating the development of renewable energy sources such as <u>wind</u>, solar, geothermal, hydro and bio-energy and energy storage at suitable locations within the county where such development has satisfactorily demonstrated that it will not have adverse impacts on the surrounding environment (including water quality), landscape, biodiversity or amenities. b) Support and facilitate renewable energy proposals that bring about a direct socio-economic benefit to the local community. The Council will engage with local communities and stakeholders in energy and encourage developers to consult with local communities to identify how they can invest in/gain from significant renewable energy development.
Objective ET 13.4: Wind Energy	In order to facilitate increased levels of renewable energy production consistent with national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation as set out in the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, the Climate Action Plan 2019, and any updates to these targets, and in accordance with Ministerial Guidelines on Wind Energy Development, the Council will support further development of on-shore wind energy projects including the upgrading or expansion of existing infrastructure, at appropriate locations within the county in line with the Wind Energy Strategy and objectives...

The Draft Plan states that “if Ireland is to meet our renewable energy target then we need to double capacity nationally over the next ten years. On a pro rata basis, that could see capacity in Cork expand to 1,100MW”.

Section 13.6 of the Draft County Development Plan details the Wind Energy Strategy for the County. The strategy remains in line with that of the County Development Plan 2014, including the wind zoning areas which places the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm within an area ‘Open to Consideration’. Relevant objectives contained within the Wind Energy Strategy are listed in Table 4.8.



Table 4-8: Objectives Pertinent to the Proposed Development – (draft) Wind Energy Strategy

Landscape Policy / Objective	Description
Objective ET 13.7: Open to Consideration	<p>Commercial wind energy development is open to consideration in these areas where proposals can avoid adverse impacts on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential amenity particularly in respect of noise, shadow flicker and visual impact; • Urban areas and Metropolitan/Town Green Belts; • Natura 2000 Sites (SPA and SAC), Natural Heritage Areas (NHA's) or adjoining areas affecting their integrity and other sites of significant ecological value. • Architectural and archaeological heritage; • Visual quality of the landscape and the degree to which impacts are highly visible over wider areas. <p>In planning such development, consideration should also be given to the cumulative impacts of such proposals.</p>
Objective ET 13.9: National Wind Energy Guidelines	<p>Development of on-shore wind should be designed and developed in line with the 'Planning Guidelines for Wind Farm Development 2006' and 'Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2019' and any relevant update of these guidelines.</p>

The Wind Energy Strategy included contained in the Draft Plan also sets out requirements for development proposals which includes a comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed development on the receiving environment, requirement for EIA and AA, community engagement and participation, grid connection details, geology and ground conditions, drainage, landscape and visual impact assessment, natural heritage, built heritage, consideration of carbon emissions, noise, shadow flicker, electromagnetic interference, transport, cumulative assessment, waste and decommissioning.

Chapter 17 of the Draft County Development Plan deals with Climate Action and sets out the Local Authority's policies and objectives for the transition to a low carbon competitive, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy. Specific climate action objectives which seek to deliver climate mitigation and adaptation included in the Draft Plan are detailed in Table 4.9.



Table 4-9: Objectives Pertinent to the Proposed Development – (draft) Climate Action

Landscape Policy / Objective	Description
Objective CA 17-1: Climate Action	Support national and local climate change objectives set out in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Planning Framework • Southern Region Spatial and Economic Strategy • Climate Action Plan (2019 or any successor plan). • National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 or any successor framework). • National Mitigation Plan (2017 or any successor plan). • Cork County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.
Objective CA 17-2: Climate Action	In order to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, an increase in renewable energy production, an increase in energy efficiency and enhanced biodiversity, support the transition to a low carbon, competitive, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 through implementation of the policies of this plan that seek to deliver the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable energy production and reduced energy consumption

The proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm is considered compliant with the policies and objectives of the Draft County Development in relation to Renewable Energy and Climate Action. The proposed wind farm is located in an area ‘open to consideration’ and will provide significant additional renewable energy to the national grid while minimising impact on the receiving environment and enhancing biodiversity, as well as improving recreation and amenity facilities.

4.6.4 Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan

Cork County Council have prepared a Local Area Plan (LAP) for each of the eight Municipal Districts which cover County Cork. The LAPs set out a land use planning strategy for the development of towns and villages across Cork. The LAPs were adopted in 2017. The proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm falls within the boundary of the Blarney Macroom Municipal District LAP.

As the LAP focuses on development within towns there is very little reference to renewable energy development and few policies regarding rural lands. However, the LAP defines the nearby Village of Ballinagree as a ‘Village Nuclei’, settlements ‘where a limited range of services is provided supplying a very local need’.



General objectives for ‘Village Nuclei’ include objectives M and N:

- m) All proposals for development within the areas identified as being at risk of flooding will need to comply with Objectives WS 6-1 and WS 6-2 as detailed in Chapter 11, Volume 1 of the Cork County Development Plan, 2014, as appropriate, and with the provision of the Ministerial Guidelines - ‘The Planning and Flood Risk Management’. In particular, a specific flood risk assessment will be required as described in WS 6-2.
- n) Encourage new development to be designed to ensure that water resources and the natural environment are protected. Protection and enhancement of biodiversity resources within the receiving environment of the village nuclei is also encouraged. Development will only be permitted where it is shown that it is compatible with the protection of sites, designated or proposed to be designated, for the protection of natural heritage.

The proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm has been designed to avoid potential impact on the nearby village of Ballinagree, including potential visual and traffic impacts. A flood risk assessment has been provided in Chapter 10 of the EIA. The design of the proposed wind farm including all mitigation measures, aims to avoid impact on the receiving environment, providing for enhancement of biodiversity and avoid impact on protected sites. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is in line with local policy as set out in the Blarney Macroom Local Area Plan (2017).

4.7 Other Relevant Policies and Guidelines

4.7.1 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government – Wind Energy Development – Planning Guidelines 2006

The Wind Energy Development Planning Guidelines (2006) published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) offer advice to planning authorities assessing planning applications for wind farm developments. The guidelines set out criteria which assist in the identification of suitable locations for wind energy development. They are also of assistance to developers and the wider public in considering wind energy development.

The proposed development has considered the provisions of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 in the design and siting of the Ballinagree Wind Farm. The proposed development is considered to be in line with the recommendations as set out in the Guidelines.

4.7.2 Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines (December 2019)

The Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines were published in December 2019 for public consultation. The guidelines will supersede the 2006 guidelines once formally adopted by the government. The revised guidelines aim to apply consistency across all Renewable Energy Strategies with regard to Development Management objectives.



The key points of note in the draft Revised Guidelines include:

- Revised set back distances. 4 times the tip height is to be applied between turbines and the nearest point of the curtilage of any residential property with a mandatory minimum set back distance of 500 meters to be applied.
- Revised noise limits provide a higher level of protection to nearby residential receptors. The draft guidelines propose a noise limit, referred to as a “*Relative Rated Noise Limit (RRNL) in the range of 35 – 43 dB(A) while not exceeding the background noise level by more than 5dB(A) with an upper limit of 43 dB(A)*” (Section 5.7.11).
- The draft guidelines confirm a policy of zero shadow flicker at nearby existing dwellings or other affected properties.
- Wind energy developers will have to provide an opportunity for the proposed development to be of enduring economic or social benefit to the local community, whether by facilitating community investment/ ownership in the project, other types of benefits/ dividends, or a combination of the two.

The proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm has been designed in accordance with the current statutory Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines, Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006. We are aware that these guidelines are subject to targeted review and therefore the design of the project has had regard to the Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines, published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (December 2019).

In this regard the proposed layout has achieved a minimum separation distance of approximately 750m between turbine locations and the closest dwellings. The proposed development is therefore in compliance with this provision. Furthermore, an objective to avoid shadow flicker at nearby dwellings through mitigation measures has also been included in the project, in line with the draft guidelines.

Furthermore, the project will provide a community benefit fund for the nearby community consisting of financial support for near neighbours and community-led projects, in line with the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) Community Benefit Fund Good Practice Principles published in 2021¹. The community benefit fund will contribute €2/MWh for all RES-E² generation produced, for projects receiving support from the RESS as describe in section 4.7.7.

The Draft Guidelines are referred to in Chapter 7 – Noise and Vibration in relation to the methodology for assessment. Here it is noted that the Draft Guidelines may be subject to further revisions following public consultation. As such, the noise limits from the 2006 guidelines form the basis of the assessment. Furthermore, the 2019 draft guidelines have a number of technical errors, ambiguities and inconsistencies relating to noise assessment and requires further detailed review and amendment.

4.7.3 Irish Wind Energy Association – Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry

The ‘Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry’ were published by the Irish Wind Energy Association in 2008 and the Guidelines were updated in 2012. These guidelines are to encourage responsible and sensitive wind farm development, and to provide assistance and recommendations for those developing onshore wind energy projects in Ireland.

¹ [RESS Community Benefit Fund Good Practice Principles 2021](#)

² Renewable energy share in electricity



The approach to the development of the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm is in line with the 2012 IWEA guidelines in that it complies with relevant planning and environmental legislation, requirements for environmental impact assessment, provides an environmentally sensitive design, takes account of best practice health and safety and provides quality public engagement in order to develop a responsible and sensitive wind energy project.

4.7.4 [IWEA Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment 2013](#)

The Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment were published by IWEA in 2013. IWEA and its members support the provision of financial contributions by wind farm operators to local communities and have sought to formulate best practice principles for the provision of a community commitment. The inclusion of community benefit has now been supplemented by the provisions of the Renewable Energy Support Scheme as described in Section 4.7.7.

However, the IWEA publication also sets out Best Practice Principles of community engagement when planning the engagement strategy and preparing associated literature. The aim of the publication is to ensure that the view of local communities is taken on board at all stages of development and that local communities share in the benefits of the development. Throughout the consultation process for the Ballinagree Wind Farm Project, specific regard has been taken of this guidance document. Details of the public and stakeholder consultation process carried out throughout the development of the project is detailed in Chapter 5 – EIA Scoping, Consultation and Key Issues.

4.7.5 [Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland – Guidelines for Community Engagement](#)

In December 2016, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) issued a code of practice for wind energy development in relation to community engagement.

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.”

The guidance states that the methods of engagement should reflect the nature of the project and the potential level of impact that it could have on a community. Throughout the consultation process the applicant has had regard to the Code of Practice for Wind Energy including the practical steps that wind farm promoters should comply with in engaging with communities as set out in this Guidance.

4.7.6 [Commission for Regulation of Utilities: Grid Connection Policy](#)

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) (previously the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER)) launched a new grid connection policy in March 2018 for renewable and other generators, known as ECP-1, which will seek to allow “shovel ready” projects that already have a valid planning permission, connect to the electricity networks. The principal objective which guides this decision is to allow those projects which are ‘shovel ready’ to have an opportunity to connect to the network, along with laying the foundations for future, more regular batches for connection.



The first connection offers were issued in August 2018 with the system operators expected to hold a further batch as soon as reasonably practical following the conclusion of the 2018 batch. On the 10 June 2020 the CRU published their decision on ECP-2 which is the second stage of the CRU's development of enduring connection policy in Ireland. This sets the policy for three annual batches, ECP 2.1, ECP 2.2 and ECP 2.3 to be held on a yearly basis. The first was held in September 2020.

The ECP system replaces the previous 'Gate' system of grid connection applications. The grid connection application window under ECP-1 was the first time since 2007 that certain renewable energy projects including wind farms, have had an opportunity to secure a new grid connection offer.

Ballinagree Wind PLC will apply for a grid connection for the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm through the ECP process following the receipt of a grant of planning permission which is required to qualify for an application.

4.7.7 Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)

The RESS scheme was launched in July 2018. The RESS is different to previous support schemes as it proposes to support renewable electricity projects through a series of scheduled, competitive auctions.

The primary policy objectives relevant to RESS include delivering Ireland's renewable electricity ambitions, increasing community participation in and ownership of renewable electricity projects, ensuring value for electricity customers and enhancing security of supply. The scheme will help deliver Ireland's contribution to the EU-wide binding renewable energy target of 32% RES by 2030 and the nation's renewed targets of 70% electricity produced by renewable sources by 2030 as set out in the Climate Action Plan (2019).

In February 2020 the Government of Ireland published the 'Terms and Conditions for the First Competition Under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme RESS 2020'. The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) is an auction scheme in which renewable energy projects bid for grid capacity. The noted document sets out the terms and conditions that apply to the first competition, RESS - 1.

Eligible projects under RESS include onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, hydro along with many other renewable generation methods. Should an applicant be successful under this system they will be invited to submit an offer price on their RESS project.

The results of the RESS-1 auction were published in August 2020. Successful onshore wind projects accounted for up to approximately 480MW of capacity. The draft terms of RESS-2 were open for public consultation until August 2021. Consultations are currently being reviewed prior to the commencement of the application process. The provision of the RESS scheme, along with the Enduring Connection Policy as detailed in 4.7.6 highlights the governments push towards a transition to a low carbon economy and the achievement of renewable energy targets as set out in the Climate Action Plan (2019).

The RESS also provides for a community benefit fund which contribute €2/MWh for all RES-E for the first 15-years of the project. In 2021 a 'Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds' was published by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications which sets out guidance for the use of the fund, ensuring that communities can support sustainable initiatives and decide themselves as to what worthy local causes need support. Guidance on division of the fund sets out 4 no. categories a – d.



Category a provides for near neighbours within 1km of a project, Category b assigns 40% of the fund for not-for-profit community enterprises, Category c provides for a maximum of 10% for administration and Category d allows the remaining balance of the fund to be spent on initiatives successful in the annual application process, as proposed by clubs and societies and similar not-for-profit entities and potential for the near neighbour payment scheme to extending to 2 km from onshore wind projects. In addition to this requirement the Developer has also committed to continuing this fund at a rate of €1/MWh for the remaining operational period of the project.

If the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm is successful in receiving planning consent, Ballinagree Wind DAC will apply for support through the RESS process. Therefore, a community benefit fund will apply to the project. The community benefit fund is further detailed in Section 11.4.3.2 of this EIAR.

4.8 Conclusion

The policy as described throughout this chapter sets out significant international, European, national and local policy support for a move to renewable energy technologies and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is committed to meeting International and European targets and if these targets are not met the government must purchase Carbon Credits to meet compliance with both emissions and renewable energy targets or face fines from the EU.

The SEAI report: Energy in Ireland (2020a) sets out the nation's latest progress towards renewable energy targets, with an overall shortfall on the 2020 targets as renewable energy production accounts for approximately 12% of the nation's energy production whereas the 2020 target was set for 16%.

While Ireland has come a long way in increasing renewable energy generation, the targets are ever increasing from a European perspective. 2050 European targets effectively mean that Europe's energy production will have to be almost carbon-free by 2050, with an aim to increase reliance on renewable electricity from 30% to 80% by 2030.

In response to this, Ireland produced the Climate Action Plan (2019) which was recently updated to the Climate Action Plan 2021 which aims to steer the country towards clean energy and reduce emissions. The CAP sets out an objective to more than double Ireland's onshore wind energy capacity to 8GW by 2030, greatly reducing the nation's dependency on fossil fuels.

Therefore, there is a clear national mandate to accommodate significant onshore wind within the next decade. Furthermore, the National Planning Framework emphasises a move to a low-carbon economy to reduce Ireland's carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets.

It is this commitment on energy and climate policy that justifies a clear need for renewable energy generation in Ireland. It is recognised a range of renewable resource alternatives are needed to meet our International and European commitments, however onshore wind is an established sector and economically competitive. It is also a proven technology that will be critical to meeting the near term renewable targets up to 2030 i.e. the key intermediate years of 2022, 2025 and 2027.



The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region supports the increased use of renewable energy sources to transition the Southern Region to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy and mitigate against climate change. The RSES aims to leverage the Southern Region as a leader and innovator in sustainable renewable energy generation, supporting the development of a renewable energy project in an appropriate location, such as that of the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm.

National and regional energy policies have been reinforced by the Cork County Development Plan 2014 which applies a plan-lead approach to wind energy development. The Ballinagree Wind Farm is located within an area considered to have capacity for wind energy development and is considered compatible with the existing land use on the site as discussed in detail in Chapter 11 – Population, Human Health & Material Assets.

The Draft Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028 also supports the production of renewable energy and actions against climate change. In line with the 2014 Development Plan, the Draft Plan places the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm in an area 'Open to Consideration' for wind energy development. The Draft Plan supports further development of on-shore wind energy projects including the upgrading or expansion of existing infrastructure, at appropriate locations within the county in line with the Wind Energy Strategy and objectives.

In conclusion, the policy context for the site and surrounding area is considered favourable for the proposed Ballinagree Wind Farm, both from a national policy perspective with regard to renewable energy provision and renewable electricity targets for the near future, and at a local level with respect to designations and the ability for the site to accommodate the proposed development while avoiding adverse impacts on the receiving environment as detailed throughout this EIA, and providing benefit to the recreational offering of the area, and financial benefit to the nearby community.



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📍 CORK OFFICE

Core House,
Pouladuff Road,
Cork, T12 D773,
Ireland
+353 21 496 4133

📍 Dublin Office

J5 Plaza,
North Park Business Park,
North Road, Dublin 11, D11 PXT0,
Ireland
+353 1 658 3500

📍 Carlow Office

Unit 6, Bagenalstown Industrial
Park, Royal Oak Road,
Muine Bheag,
Co. Carlow, R21 XW81,
Ireland
+353 59 972 3800

