



Planning Statement

Knockanarragh Wind Farm Ltd.

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Basis of Report

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

SLR	SLR Consulting Limited
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
SID	Strategic Infrastructure Development
WEG	Wind Energy Development Guidelines
CRM	Collision Risk Model
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
MCDP	Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027
WCDP	Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027
ABP	An Bord Pleanála
DMAP	Designated Maritime Area Plan
CAP23	The Climate Action Plan 2023
CAP24	The Climate Action Plan 2024
RESS	Renewable Electricity Support Scheme
GHGs	Greenhouse Gases
CCAC	Climate Change Advisory Council
NPF	National Planning Framework
NSO	National Strategic Outcomes
RSO	Regional Strategic Outcomes
RPO	Regional Policy Objectives
NPO	National Policy Objective
NDP	National Development Plan
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
EMRA	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
IWEA	Irish Wind Energy Association
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
WCC	Westmeath County Council
CDP	County Development Plan



1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by SLR in support of this planning application made by Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited for the development of an 8 no turbine wind farm in the counties of Meath and Westmeath.

The report provides an overview of the Proposed Development (as defined in Chapter 2 of the accompanying EIAR) and related project rationale. It appropriately considers relevant considerations within EU Directives and Policies, National Policies and Legislation, Regional Planning Policy, and Local Planning Policy, including the NPF, RSES, WEG, the WCDP, and associated Direction¹, and the MCDP.

This report should also be read in conjunction with the EIAR submitted with this planning application. It is submitted that the Proposed Development should be seen as contributing to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

1.1 Purpose and Structure of the Planning Statement

This Planning Statement considers the Proposed Development in the context of compliance with and contribution to the principles of proper planning and sustainable development, having regard to International, European, National, Regional and County-level planning policies and plans including County Development Plans, together with relevant statutory guidelines and legislation.

This Planning Statement is set out as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: The Proposed Development
- Section 3: The Need for the Development
- Section 4: Relevant Planning Policy
- Section 5: Conclusion

2.0 The Proposed Development

Knockanarragh Wind Farm Ltd. are seeking permission for a Proposed Development which will consist of which will consist of an 8 no turbine wind farm development and associated works on land within the townlands of Clonmellon, Kilrush Upper, Kilrush Lower, Newtown, Ballinlig, Carnybrogan, Cavestown and Rosmead, County Westmeath and Galboystown, Co. Meath. The planning application area is approximately 115.81 ha in size.

The Proposed Development will consist of:

- Construction of 8 No. wind turbines with an overall ground to blade tip height of between 175m – 180m inclusive. The wind turbines will have a rotor diameter ranging from 155m to 162m inclusive and a hub height ranging from 97.5m to 99m inclusive. Each turbine will have individual output of between 6.6MW to 7.2MW inclusive.
- Construction of temporary crane hardstands and permanent turbine foundations.
- Construction of permanent internal site access roads including passing bays and all associated drainage infrastructure

¹ Direction In the Matter of Section 31 Of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (As Amended) Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

- Construction of 1 no. permanent 110 kV electrical substation west of Clonmellon, Co Meath to include 2 no. control buildings with welfare facilities, all associated electrical plant and equipment, security fencing and gates, all associated underground cabling, wastewater holding tank, and all ancillary structures, bunding and works.
- Construction of 33kV underground electricity cabling, including joint bays and ancillary works, along the L5542 and N52 connecting the Main Wind Farm Development Site: to the Proposed 110kV Substation at Clonmellon.
- Construction of a section of 110kV electricity cabling between the Proposed 110kV Substation and the existing overhead line at Clonmellon, inclusive of 110kV interface masts.
- Construction of an internal collector cable circuit within the Main Wind Farm Development Site, including directional drilling of (125m) cabling between Turbine 5 and Turbine 8.
- Construction of two construction compounds with associated temporary site offices, parking areas, welfare facilities and security fencing.
- The use of the construction compound in the Southern Cluster as a maintenance hub to facilitate the operational phase of development.
- Development of two borrow pits for the purpose of stone extraction.
- Undergrounding of approximately 610 metres of existing 10 kV overhead electrical power line in the vicinity of Turbine 6.
- Development of an internal site drainage network and sediment control systems.
- Improvements to an existing site entrance off the L5542/Carnybrogan local road to include localised widening of the road and creation of a splayed entrance to facilitate the delivery of abnormal loads and turbine component deliveries. Improvements will include removal of existing vegetation to accommodate visibility splays.
- A new site entrance and slip road from the L5542/Carnybrogan local road to facilitate the delivery of abnormal loads and turbine component deliveries to northern part of the site.
- Road improvements to L5542/Carnybrogan local road to facilitate the delivery of abnormal loads and turbine component deliveries.
- A new site entrance to T8 from the N52 via an existing agricultural access within the townlands of Cavestown and Rosmead.
- A new site entrance from the L6821 to the Proposed 110 kV Substation at Clonmellon.
- Ancillary forestry felling of between 19.62ha and 20.09ha to facilitate construction of the development.
- All associated site development works including berms, landscaping, and soil excavation and the ongoing maintenance and management of the biodiversity measures in accordance with the Habitats and Species Management Plan.
- Measures for biodiversity enhancement including wader scrapes for snipe, stockproof fencing and other measures.
- The enhancement and replacement of hedgerows and broadleaf trees and the planting of new hedgerows and trees.
- A 35-year operational life for the Wind Turbines from the date of commissioning of the entire Proposed Development.

This planning application seeks a 10-year construction period and will be accompanied by an EIAR which includes an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development as a whole and in combination with the relevant off-site or secondary developments which will occur as a direct result of the Proposed Development, including connection to the national electricity grid.

A NIS will also be submitted to the planning authority with the planning application.

The Proposed Development Site is located in close proximity to sites on the Record of Monument and Places (RMP sites, WM009-004, WM009-018 and ME023-010) and the following structures that are included on the Record of Protected Structures (009-048 and 009-03).

2.1 Statement of Authority

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Aislinn O'Brien (Masters in Regional and Local Development and MCD in Civic Design), Donna Ryan (BA in Spatial Planning and Diploma in Environmental Resource Management), and Edward Goulding (BA in Planning, Geography & Environmental Policy, Masters in Planning and Development) of SLR Consulting.

- Aislinn O'Brien is a chartered planner (MIPI, MRTPI) with 17 years experience as a planner, project manager with experience in large scale infrastructure, including windfarms, tourism, minerals, and other developments.
- Donna Ryan is a chartered planner (MIPI) and has over 15 years' experience as a planner and project manager, including planning input for SID applications for large scale transportation applications; and industrial and commercial developments. Other experience includes preparing environmental and planning reports for a wide range of projects.
- Edward Goulding is a graduate planner with SLR consulting and has 2 years' experience in planning and consultation, including windfarm applications.

2.2 Requirement of EIA

This Section reviews the Proposed Development against the Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 – "The EIA Directive" and its requirements as transposed into Irish law.

Schedule 5, Part 2 (3)(i) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) "Planning Regulations" refers to:

"Installations for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (wind farms) with more than 5 turbines or having a total output greater than 5 megawatts".

The Proposed Development includes 8 no turbines and therefore falls within a class of development set out in Schedule 5, Part 1 and 2. It therefore meets the requirements for a mandatory EIA in this regard.

Furthermore, a notice has been served by An Bord Pleanála under section 37(B)(4)(a) confirming the development is SID. As such an EIAR is mandatory - section **37E(1) of the PDA 2000 provides as follows:** "*(1) An application for permission for development in respect of which a notice has been served under section 37B(4)(a) shall be made to the Board and shall be accompanied by an F384[environmental impact assessment report] in respect of the proposed development.*"

2.3 Appropriate Assessment

With respect to European Sites within the vicinity of the Proposed Development Site, an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement were prepared to provide the information for the competent authority, in this case An Bord Pleanála, to carry out a screening assessment and, if considered applicable by An Bord Pleanála an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the Proposed Development in accordance with and in

fulfilment of the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) Further details and an assessment of the likely impact of the Proposed Development thereon is provided in the EIAR, AA Screening Report and NIS which accompany this planning application.

The AA Screening Report concludes that it cannot be excluded on the basis of objective evidence and in view of best scientific knowledge, that there will be any likely significant effects from the construction, operation, or decommissioning activities from the Proposed Development alone, or in combination with other plans or projects, on:

- River Boyne and River Blackwater cSAC,
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA, and
- Lough Derravarragh SPA.

The AA Screening Report also concludes that it can be excluded on the basis of objective evidence and in view of best scientific knowledge, that there will be any likely significant effects from the Proposed Development alone, or in combination with other plans or projects, on any other European site including (without limitation) Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC, Lough Bane and Lough Glass cSAC, Lough Lene SAC, White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC, Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC, Mount Hevey Bog SAC, Wooddown Bog SAC 002205 and Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA.

With the full implementation of the mitigation measures identified, the AA Screening Report concludes, beyond all reasonable doubt that the Proposed Development will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

A proposed mitigation scheme for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases is described, within the AA Screening Report and these mitigation measures will be implemented in full. This is summarized in Chapter 17 of the EIAR and in the CEMP which is submitted as Appendix 2-2 of the EIAR and Appendix 6 of the AA Screening Report and NIS.

Based on the information set out in the AA Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement report, we submit that the competent authority has sufficient information to allow it to determine that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant adverse effect on the integrity on any European sites.

2.4 Design Flexibility

Technology in the realm of wind energy is constantly evolving, with newer, more efficient turbines coming onto the market while other turbines are discontinued. These changes generally become apparent post grant of permission during the procurement process. The time it takes to get from planning submission to the procurement stage post consent, grid connection offer and route to market can take anywhere up to 6 to 7 years which is also why ten-year planning permissions are sought for Wind Farm developments. At this stage any exact dimensions set out in a planning application and associated grant of permission may no longer fully apply.

For this reason, the Client (Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited) is requesting specific design parameters to be consented to avoid a requirement to amend the permission (if granted) at procurement stage. As the exact specification of turbine will not be available at the time of lodging this application, the Client is therefore requesting specific design parameters to be consented in line with the judgments of Judge Humphreys in *Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála (No. 1) [2020] IEHC 390 (Derryadd No. 1)* and in *Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála & Ors [2021] IEHC 662 (Derryadd No. 2)*. These judgments made certain findings in relation to the

application of an ‘open-ended’ design envelope in the plans and particulars submitted as part of the Derryadd Wind Farm planning application.

In Derryadd No. 1 Judge Humphreys stated that *“The 2001 Regulations require plans and particulars. That isn’t compatible with a widely-variable-design application where the designs, dimensions or locations of structures are not specified in the application itself, either by reference to precise terms or to a **reasonably limited range** that could not in itself raise any reasonable planning objection”* stated further that, *“Specifying particulars of the works is the statutory obligation –not to seek permission for a project that is open-ended at one end of the scale and which could be anything up to a maximum specified”*.

In Derryadd No. 2, Judge Humphreys provided further clarification on his judgement in Derryadd No. 1 granting leave to appeal the above referenced judgment. In Derryadd No. 2 Judge Humphreys held that the main issue with the Derryadd application was the open-ended nature of the design envelope. He stated *“... why it is appropriate or necessary for the notice party here to be able to apply for a permission that allows the construction of a turbine that is for example one metre high or one that is 185 metres high at its own subsequent discretion, subject to agreement with the planning authority pursuant to the condition imposed by the board. **A reasonable albeit limited degree of flexibility yes, particularly in a changing context like wind turbines, but a completely open-ended permission at one end of the scale goes far beyond what is necessary or appropriate and indeed makes very little sense”**.*

Furthermore, Judge Humphreys stated, *“there is no difficulty with the general concept of a design envelope provided it is within a certain limited flexibility”*. He also stated that *“...a variation of plus or minus 10% from a mean height specified in the application might have been legitimately within the concept of plans and particulars in the context of a turbine...”*.

In light of the above excerpts of the Derryadd judgments and clarification of Judge Humphreys combined with potential procurement stage risks as noted above, the design flexibility that is sought as part of the Proposed Development is not open ended and will comprise the following limited range:

- **Tip Height:** overall ground to blade tip height of between a minimum of 175m and a maximum of 180m.
- **Rotor Diameter:** The wind turbines will have a rotor diameter ranging from a minimum of 155m to a maximum of 162m.
- **Hub Height:** a hub height ranging from a minimum of 97.5m to a maximum of 99m.- All elements of the Proposed Development are described in Chapter 2 of the accompanying EIAR.

The minimum and maximum parameters proposed in **Table 2-1** were identified from two candidate turbine models.

Table 2-1 Candidate Turbine Parameters

Turbine Type	Tip Height (m)	Hub Height (m)	Rotor Diameter (m)	Foundation Size	Hardstand dimensions	Power Output (for Climate change assessment purposes only)
Type Siemens Gamesa 155	175	97.5	155	21.5m diameter	50m x 20m	6.6MW

Vestas V162	180	99	162	28.4m diameter	82m x 30m	7.2MW
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The final choice of turbine model will be dictated by the energy production efficiencies of various turbines on the market at the time of the turbine procurement. As a result, the exact specification of turbine within the range is not available at the time of lodging this application. The following elements therefore cannot be confirmed:

- Hub Height
- Rotor Diameter
- Hardstand dimensions
- Foundation size
- Power Output

The candidate turbines provide the minimum and maximum parameters for the rotor diameter, hub height and hardstand. The installed wind turbine may not be either of the two candidate turbines but will be within the range of minimum and maximum parameters set out in **Table 2-1**. Please note: the MW output is stated here based on turbines of a 6.6MW and a 7.2MW output and only for the purposes of assessment of benefits towards climate as set out in **Chapter 8** of the EIAR.

The EIAR has assessed both the minimum and maximum parameters of the tip height, hardstand dimensions, foundation size and power output, which has allowed for an assessment of all permutations within the range. **Table 2-2** explains, for each environmental topic, which permutation will result in the greatest environmental effect and therefore allows for the assessment of all permutations within the range. The EIAR has also stated whether there are any differences in the significance of the effects for the other permutations within the range (i.e., for those permutations that do not have the greatest environmental impact). The defined limited flexibility as set out above is compatible with the requirements of the Planning Regulations and with the Derryadd judgements.

Two turbine types have been assessed as part of this planning application. These are the Siemens Gamesa 155 and the Vestas V162 turbines. However, the Client is not seeking permission for one or the other, rather; the Applicant is seeking permission to construct a turbine which falls within the range as outlined above.

Both turbine models have been modelled and all scenarios have been assessed. We respectfully request as part of the determination process for the Proposed Development, that An Bord Pleanála provides a planning condition that facilitates the development parameters as outlined above, but not limiting it to a specific turbine type. An explanation of how all permutations within the range have been assessed for each chapter is set out in **Table 2-2**

Table 2-2 How the Design Parameters Were Assessed for Each Topic within the EIAR (Please refer to the individual Chapters of the EIAR for further details).

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
Chapter 4 Population and Human Health	This chapter assesses all of the design permutations of the turbine dimensions, hardstand, foundations, and MW output for potential effects on Population Human Health, Socioeconomics, Recreation, and the Community Benefit Fund. The different permutations of

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
	<p>design parameters will not result in significantly different development outcomes particularly in relation to MW Output. At outputs between 6.6MW and 7.2MW, the differences are marginal in that they do not change the significance of the effect in relation to employment and economic benefit.</p> <p>The assessment of Population and Human Health also provides an overview appraisal of the potential impact of a type and scale of development on local residents and communities, therefore the ultimate choice of specific design of wind turbines does not impact on the findings within it. However, where information is obtained from more detailed technical chapters, for example noise, air, and landscape, and where there are variations in impacts depending on design parameters, those findings are incorporated into the assessment on amenity and/or human health as appropriate.</p>
<p>Chapter 5 Biodiversity</p>	<p>In this topic, SLR undertook a Collision Risk Model (CRM) for birds incorporating the minimum/maximum spans of each candidate turbine model to produce two CRMs. CRM assessed the tip height with the lowest rotor swept height. The worst-case results were presented for impact assessment in the EIAR but there were no likely significant differences in the effects predicted between the two CRM models (which also encompass all other options within the range). This was due to very small differences in lowest rotor swept heights (2m difference) and tip heights (5m difference) between the candidate turbine models i.e., the collision risk heights. Therefore, a similar number of birds are predicted to collide with the two different candidate turbine models (and all options within the range).</p> <p>For bat mitigation buffers, SLR has examined both sets of turbine dimensions and has presented the bat collision risk assessment for the turbine requiring the largest bat mitigation buffers (rotor diameter of 162m).</p> <p>The bat mitigation buffers for the turbines with a rotor diameter of 155m would be smaller than for the turbines with a rotor diameter of 162m but crucially, would still provide the 50 m separation distance of from blade tip to vegetation feature height required by best-practice guidance. This is because the bat buffer diameter reflects the turbine dimensions chosen.</p> <p>Regarding habitat loss, the bat mitigation buffer felling requirement for the 162m diameter turbine model are higher than the felling requirement for the 155m diameter model. The worst-case scenario for habitat loss was presented in relation to the turbine hardstand and foundation requirements for the turbines associated with the greater dimensions (turbine model with rotor diameter of 162m). While the habitat loss associated with the felling buffers, hardstands and foundations associated with the 155m turbine model is less, there are no likely significant differences in the effects predicted. This is because the amounts of habitat to be lost are of very similar orders of magnitude for the two candidate turbine models assessed (which includes all options within the range).</p>

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
<p>Chapter 6 Land Soils and Geology</p>	<p>The worst-case scenario assessed was in relation to the turbine hardstanding and foundation requirements with a 28.4m diameter foundation and an 82m by 30m hardstand rather than those with a 21.5m diameter foundation and 50m x 20m hardstand. Utilising the maximum dimensions within the range specified in Table 2-1 encompasses all design permutations of the dimensions and represents the maximum disturbance and therefore the maximum potential footprint / area of ground disturbance covered by the operational infrastructure.</p> <p>It is considered here that the potential significance of the 21.5m diameter foundation and 50m x 20m hardstand design would not result in a difference in significance of effect compared to the worst-case scenario, which is the 28.4 m diameter foundation and an 82m x 30m hardstand. This is because the assessment uses a matrix approach, whereby significance of effect is a function of the sensitivity of the receptor by the magnitude of the potential impact. The sensitivity (importance) of the receptors is inherent and cannot be changed in either design used, it is independent of the development proposed.</p> <p>For the potential magnitude of the impact, in the context of the 2 km baseline study area (in line with IGI guidance), the difference in area between 19,680 m² (worst case scenario) and 8,000 m² (other scenario) for the hardstandings is considered to be marginal and does not result in a downgrading of the potential impact magnitude. Furthermore, it is considered that the only potential magnitude of impact that could be considered is a downgrading from “low” to “negligible” magnitude of impact on a receptor (during construction where geological are originally in situ), where relevant. This is not considered appropriate as it would imply that there is no measurable change to a receptor during construction, and in the case where there is change to land and geological features in either design scenario to allow hardstanding’s to be constructed, a “negligible” impact magnitude is not considered appropriate. There will be a removal/disturbance to land and soils to create hardstanding’s for example, this is a measurable change to a receptor, albeit a small loss of part of the geological receptor.</p>
<p>Chapter 7 Water</p>	<p>Assessment was undertaken on a worst-case scenario which represents maximum disturbance and therefore the greatest potential for change to the water environment (hydrology and hydrogeology). This was based upon the turbine hardstanding requirements which encompassed a 28.4 m diameter foundation and an 82m x 30m hardstand rather than the 21.5m diameter foundation and 50m x 20m hardstand which would encompass a smaller area.</p> <p>This chapter assesses the Proposed Development, including the design parameters outlined in Table 2-1. Assessment was undertaken on the turbine hardstanding requirements for the V162 which encompassed a 28.4 m diameter foundation and an 82m x 30m</p>

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
	hardstand as well as the 21.5m diameter foundation and 50m x 20m hardstand. Both turbine types have been assessed as part of this chapter, and the significance level was the same for both assessments.
Chapter 8 Air and climate	For this topic, all turbine permutations from the dimensions as set out in Table 2-1 above are covered. Air quality and climate resilience have been assessed for all turbine dimensions. The difference between the design parameters of the two turbine types are considered to be minimal and not significant in terms of air quality and climate resilience. A Carbon Analyse has been carried out and included as Appendix 8.1 found in Volume III of the EIAR accompanying this planning application. The carbon calculations for the Proposed Development are based on the two candidate turbine models have both been assessed against their impact on the national carbon budgets. Both are deemed to have a significant beneficial impact on the carbon budget with the larger model having a slightly more significant impact due to its greater power output.
Chapter 9 Noise	<p>Noise modelling for both turbine types was carried out and assessed within the chapter. The worst-case scenario for construction noise was assessed, which is valid for all design permutations equally.</p> <p>The operational noise produced by a wind turbine varies between type (Vestas V162 will produce different levels of noise for any given wind speed than a Siemens Gamesa SG155 for example) therefore the assessment considers operational noise impacts from both turbine types discussed in the EIAR as there is a potential that they could be different. Construction noise will not be dependent on the turbine type – the noise associated with the excavation, and fabrication, of foundations (for example) will be the same regardless of what turbine type is installed on top of it.</p> <p>The operational noise modelling for the Proposed Development is based on these two turbine types to form a maximum/minimum scenario. Both turbine types were assessed as part of this chapter, and it is considered that all design permutations encompassed in Table 2-1 above have been assessed. Different turbine types produce different noise levels. The hub height has the potential to affect the noise impact at receptors, which in turn may affect significance of effect.</p>
Chapter 10 Landscape and visual	All turbine dimensions have been assessed in the LVIA which encompass all dimensions as set out in Table 2-1 . above. The difference between the design parameters of the two turbine types are considered to be minimal and not significant in terms of landscape and visual effects, however in terms of dimensions, the largest magnitude impact for Landscape and Visual is the 180m tip height which is shown in the photomontages.
Chapter 11 Shadow flicker	In this topic, SLR assessed both turbine models. We have included the shadow flicker results as Appendices 11.1 and 11.2 found in Volume III of the EIAR. The worst case scenario is defined in section 14.2.4 as “based on the sun shining during all daylight hours over the

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
	<p><i>course of a year, no obscuring features (such as trees, hedges, other buildings) being present, the face of the rotor always being aligned towards the dwelling, and that the rotor is always turning (i.e. the wind is always blowing between 4m/s and 25m/s, and no account is taken of shut down periods for maintenance). This methodology yields a theoretical maximum indication of potential shadow flicker incidence, together with the times of day, and dates during the year when potential incidence may occur".</i> The study area is determined by the rotor diameter and in this case, the rotor diameter of 162m or the maximum parameter is considered to be the worst case scenario and covers all design permutations encompassed in Table 2-1. The design parameters of rotor diameter and distance from proposed turbines to receptors drive the impact on shadow flicker. Although, the rotor diameter of 162m or the maximum parameter results in effects on a marginally greater number of properties, both turbine models (rotor diameter of 155m and 162m) result in significant effects without mitigation.</p>
<p>Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage</p>	<p>In this chapter, the range of turbine dimensions was not a concern for effects upon the setting of cultural heritage assets, as there is only a marginal difference in turbine tip height. A settings assessment for the potential effects on cultural and archaeological assets in the study parameters for the Proposed Development was carried out, however the difference in design parameters between each turbine was minimal. The different permutations of design parameters did not affect the significance of the effect in relation to Cultural Heritage. The difference is considered to be imperceptible in terms of impact on the setting of cultural and archaeological assets.</p> <p>For direct impacts upon archaeological remains within the Proposed Development Site, the worst case scenario would be the larger dimensions of the hardstanding dimensions (82m x 30m), and therefore this was used to assess the potential direct impacts on archaeological features within the Proposed Development Site, as the larger footprint of 82m x 30m would have more potential for direct impacts compared to the hardstanding area of 50m x 20m. Overall, for both turbine types the significance of effects would not change; the heights of the turbines would not cause and variation in potential setting impacts, nor would the different dimensions of the turbines footprint cause changes to potential direct impacts upon archaeological remains.</p>
<p>Chapter 13 Material Assets, including Telecommunications / Aviation</p>	<p>Utility providers, including telecommunication companies, and aviation authorities were consulted on the basis of the upper limit of design parameters to be incorporated. None of those contacted raised any concerns with the Proposed Development within the maximum parameters, therefore it can be inferred that there will be no impact to services should these be implemented at a reduced scale.</p> <p>Ongoing engagement with Eirgrid and ESB Networks throughout the detailed design and implementation of the Proposed Development will ensure effective management of any variations between design parameters.</p>

EIA Topic	Assessment Parameters
	Variations in hardstanding requirements depending on design parameters are assessed in Chapter 7 of the EIA, and these are not considered to have implications for material assets.
Chapter 14 Traffic/Transport	The worst-case scenario turbine due to blade length is the turbine with the rotor diameter of 162m which was assessed for all swept path analysis for the Proposed Development and the worst-case scenario of trips (infrastructure delivery, materials) has been assessed based on the worst-case scenario of these infrastructural requirements. The worst case includes larger turbine components including a longer blade length. This assessment covers all design permutations encompassed in Table 2-1 . The different permutations of design parameters did not affect the significance of the effect in relation to Traffic. The turbine with the rotor diameter of 155m will result in a marginally smaller swept path however the significance of the effect will remain unchanged because all turbines within the range must still be delivered to the site.
Chapter 15 Major accidents and Natural disasters	This chapter assesses the design permutations of the turbine dimensions as set out in Table 2-1 . above, hardstand, foundations against the effects identified in the Major accidents and Natural disasters Chapter. The different permutations did not affect the significance of the effect in relation to Major accidents and Natural disasters.
Chapter 16 Interactions of the Foregoing	As set out within each of the technical headings above, the actual variation in impacts depending on final selection of design parameters was considered to be minimal. The purpose of assessment of interactions of effects is to ensure that potential for any additional interactive effects over and above those considered within respective technical assessments is identified. Given the minimal difference that has been identified between effects of design parameters it is not considered that there will be any implications for potential interactions depending on ultimate design parameters selected. There will be no change to the potential impacts or predicted effects irrespective of which turbine dimensions are selected within the design parameters outlined.

2.5 Classification as Strategic Infrastructure Development

The Seventh Schedule to the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) identifies various classes of infrastructure development which, if considered by An Bord Pleanála to be Strategic Infrastructure Development, (SID) requires a planning application to be made directly to it rather than to the relevant local planning authority.

To qualify as SID Section 37A (2) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) stipulates that a project,

- i. falls within the scope of one or more of the development classes identified in the Seventh Schedule and any thresholds provided therein:
- ii. would satisfy one or more of the following criteria:
 - a. It is of strategic economic or social importance to the State or the region in which it would be situate.

- b. *It would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives of the National Planning Framework or in any regional spatial and economic strategy in force in respect of the area or areas in which the development would be situated.*
- c. *It would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority.*

The Proposed Development is expected to have a MW output of between 52.8MW and 57.6MW and is therefore covered by the following class of development identified under the heading of 'Energy Infrastructure' in the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended):

Development comprising or for the purposes of any of the following (inter alia)

"an installation for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (a wind farm) with more than 25 turbines or having a total output greater than 50 MW."

Please note: the MW output is stated here based on turbines of a 6.6MW and a 7.2MW output and only for the purposes of assessment of benefits towards climate as set out in Chapter 8.

2.6 Confirmation of SID

A pre application request was made to An Bord Pleanála under reference ABP-314271-22 for a determination that an application of this scale would be considered to be SID. In An Bord Pleanála's response letter dated 25th of August 2023, it was confirmed that the Proposed Development falls within the scope of paragraphs 37A(2)(a), (b) and (c) of the Act. Accordingly, An Bord Pleanála have decided that the Proposed Development is a SID within the meaning of Section 37A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

2.7 Pre-planning Consultation

2.7.1 An Bord Pleanála

In the first pre-application consultation with An Bord Pleanála on the 22nd of October 2022, several items were raised concerning the Proposed Development. The Board emphasised the need for clarity on policy objective CPO 10.143 and Ministerial Direction. Questions were raised about the environmental impact, particularly concerning large-scale commercial peat extraction, tree felling, and effects on native woodlands. The Board also inquired about logistical challenges with respect to the TDR, such as access points and narrow bridge crossings, and the prospective applicant's engagement with local councils and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

The Board advised the applicant to consider visual and hydrological impacts, especially given the site's proximity to Meath County Council's administrative area. Points were also raised on potential impact on nearby national monuments and archaeological sites. The Board requested further consideration of environmental risks, including impacts on aquatic environments and local flora and fauna, in compliance with the Water Framework Directive. The Board also recommended that the EIAR outline the carbon resources required for construction and the anticipated carbon savings.

Finally, the Board indicated that the project's Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) status would be determined at the end of the pre-application process and advised keeping the current pre-application case open for ongoing consultations and updates.

A second pre-application meeting with An Bord Pleanála was held on 6th March 2023. During this meeting the Board's representatives raised several points relevant to the Proposed Development. The Board sought clarity on the approach to design flexibility of the proposed turbines and advised that the development would likely constitute strategic infrastructure. The Board also queried whether scoping responses had been provided by Westmeath County Council's Road Design Office.

The Board advised the applicant to provide rationale for the approach to the biodiversity Chapter of the EIAR in the context of the submission made by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) regarding nocturnal bird surveys. Additionally, the Board inquired about the response from the TII on the new proposed access point on the N52.

On the 25th of August 2023, An Bord Pleanála served notice under section 37B(4)(a) that it is of the opinion that the Proposed Development falls within the scope of paragraphs 37A (2) (a), (b) and (c) of the Act. The notice confirmed that, "*The Board has decided that the Proposed development would be strategic infrastructure within the meaning of 37 A of the Planning and development Act 2000, as amended*".

The applicant is aware that, following the completion of the section 37B pre-consultation process on 25 August 2023, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage published SI 645/2023 - Planning and Development, Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act 2022 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No2) Order 2023 (the "**Commencement Order**"). The Commencement Order commenced, amongst other things, the operation of sections within the Planning and Development, Maritime and Valuation (Amendment) Act 2022 which inserted new sections 37CC, 37CD, and 37CE to the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (the "**PDA**").

Section 37CC (1) of the PDA states, "A person who proposes to apply for permission for any development specified in the Seventh Schedule (referred to in this section and section 37CD as a 'prospective applicant') may request a meeting with the Board for the purposes of section 37CD as part of consultations referred to in section 37B (1)".

The Board's opinion under section 37CD relates to whether it is appropriate that an application for permission be made before certain details of the proposed development are confirmed. It is noted that this application has proposed a limited degree of flexibility for the tip height, rotor diameter, hub height, and foundation size as the exact details within the proposed range will not be confirmed until after the application is determined (see section 2.3). Given the urgency of the need for the development, the applicant will not avail of the option to obtain the Board's opinion under section 37CD. It is noted that it is discretionary to obtain the opinion as a prospective applicant "may request" a meeting (section 37CC (1)). The process under section 37CC and 37CD only occurs if the applicant has requested that meeting.

The discretionary nature of section 37CC is confirmed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in its Circular Letter PL:11/2023 dated 21 December 2023. The letter states, inter alia:

"The primary legislation provides for a process whereby a prospective applicant/project promoter who wishes to avail of a degree of flexibility in their planning application may, in advance of submitting their planning application, request a meeting with the planning authority or the Board for the purpose of receiving an opinion as to whether it is appropriate that an application for permission be made before certain details of the proposed development are confirmed".

Further, article 3 of SI No 655/2023 - Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2023 inserts a new Part 3A to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) (the “Planning Regulations”). Article 15J (4) in Part 3A of the Planning Regulations states:

“A planning application may be accompanied by an opinion on unconfirmed details and any such planning application shall be accompanied by a copy of the form set out at Form No. 22 of Schedule 3, or a form substantially to the like effect”.

Article 15J also makes it discretionary for the Applicant to choose whether or not to include a section 37CD opinion from the Board in a section 37E planning application.

Accordingly, the Applicant is submitting this 37E planning application, which seeks design flexibility as described in the application documentation, without availing of the option to request a section 37CC meeting with the Board. The Applicant respectfully requests that if the Board is minded to grant planning permission, the planning permission conditions allow for the flexibility proposed in the planning application.

2.7.2 Westmeath County Council

A pre-application consultation meeting was held with the Applicant and Westmeath County Council (WCC) on 21st September 2022. Key points raised at this meeting included land ownership and access. Policy considerations were also discussed, with the development noted to align with relevant policies. However, it was also noted that the project should also consider its environmental impact, especially its proximity to peatlands. Environmental concerns were also raised around the potential for shadow flicker due to the proximity of housing. The Stoneyford river was identified as being at risk during the construction phase, and the impact on the setting of Rosmead House was noted to require further assessment.

Representatives from the Roads Development requested further information on the proposed cable route and the proposed site access arrangements, stating that more details were needed, especially concerning the impact along the N52. It was agreed that the proposed design of access arrangements would be issued to the Roads Authority for comment prior to submitting the application.

WCC Representatives noted the quality design of the Wind Farm and outlined the restrictions of the CDP Policy Objectives in siting the Proposed Development at this location, within the remit of a Section 34 planning application.

Follow-up consultation took place between the design team and Roads Department of Westmeath County Council, with respect to the proposed access arrangements.

2.7.3 Meath County Council

A pre-planning meeting was sought with Meath County Council (MCC) on the 17th of August 2022, but could not be facilitated during to resource availability. Pre application Consultation with MCC was therefore dealt with by way of a written response to the Preliminary Scoping Report. As part of this response, MCC outlined several potential issues concerning the proposed development. The Council emphasized the need for a consistent red line site boundary across all submitted documents and advised that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should consider the likely significant effects of the entire development. The Council also pointed to the importance of adhering to the MCDP, particularly its policies on wind energy, grid connections, climate change, and cultural and natural heritage.

The Council requested that the landscape and visual assessment be conducted in the context of its Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), considering the impact on character

areas, sensitivity, and viewpoints. It also noted that the proposed development would be particularly visible from specific viewpoints listed in the MCDP. Additionally, MCC highlighted the need to consider the impact on architectural heritage and national monuments in proximity to the site. Overall, the Council stressed the importance of comprehensive planning and environmental assessments to ensure the proposed development aligned with local and national guidelines.

2.8 Prescribed Bodies

Included in the letter issued by An Bord Pleanála on the 25th of August 2023 (ABP-314271-22), was a list of prescribed bodies to be notified of the SID application for the Proposed Development as follows:

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Westmeath County Council
- Meath County Council
- Midlands and Regional Assembly
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (development Applications Unit)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Irish Water
- Irish Aviation Authority
- Health Service Executive
- Commission for Regulation of utilities
- Office of Public Works.

All of the prescribed bodies listed above have been notified of the Proposed SID application and issued with a full copy of all plans and particulars associated with the application. In addition to this a number have been consulted as part of the scoping exercised for the EIAR which is accompanied with this application under separate cover.

3.0 The Need for the Development

The need for the Proposed Development is closely aligned with National energy and climate policy which in turn is derived from the overarching European Policy which aims to unify the European Union in energy and climate goals. A full assessment of international, national, regional, and local policies is found below.

3.1 International Global Policies

3.1.1 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

In 1992, Ireland joined an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as a framework for international efforts to combat the challenge posed by climate change. 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 UNFCCC seeks to limit average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change.

In addition, the UNFCCC seeks to cope with impacts that are already inevitable. It recognises that the climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other GHGs. The framework sets no binding limits on GHG emissions for individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms. Instead, the framework outlines how specific international treaties (referred to as 'Protocols' or 'Agreements') may be negotiated to set binding limits on GHGs. 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.

3.1.2 Kyoto Protocol

Ireland is a Party to the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement that sets limitations and reduction targets for GHGs for developed countries. It came into effect in 2005, as a result of which, emission reduction targets agreed by developed countries, including Ireland, are binding. Furthermore, In Doha, Qatar, on 8th December 2012, the "Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol" was adopted. The amendment includes:

- New commitments for Annex I Parties to the Kyoto Protocol who agreed to take on commitments in a second commitment period from 1st January 2013 to 31st December 2020.
- A revised list of GHG to be reported on by Parties in the second commitment period; and
- Amendments to several articles of the Kyoto Protocol which specifically referenced issues pertaining to the first commitment period and which needed to be updated for the second commitment period.

During the first commitment period:

- A 5% overall reduction in the emission of GHGs in developed countries was set.
- An average 8% reduction below 1990 levels within the EU was also set.

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

Under the protocol, countries must meet their targets primarily through national measures, although market-based mechanisms such as international emissions trading, through the EU Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) can also be utilised.

3.1.3 COP 21 Paris Agreement

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, including Ireland 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, Ireland 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.

3.1.4 COP25 Madrid

COP25, the 25th session of the COP, was held between the 2nd and 13th of December 2019 in Madrid. The conference was characterised by repeated warnings from civil society (NGOs and corporates) on emerging evidence and scientific consensus on climate change risk. Specifically, it is noted that there are only '10 years left' before the opportunity of limiting global warming to 1.5°C is no longer feasible. As such, the only scenario that makes it possible is a '7.6% reduction of global GHG emissions every year between 2020 and 2030, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050'. However, there was no consensus achieved between States to finalise the operating rules of the Paris Agreement and ensure that it became operational by 2020.

3.1.5 COP26 Glasgow

COP26 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.

3.1.6 COP27 Sharm el-Sheikh

COP27 was held in November 2022, in Egypt, where a number of agreements were taken amongst parties. Including an agreement on a "Loss and Damage" Fund for vulnerable countries hit by climate disasters was agreed.

3.1.7 COP28 United Arab Emirates

COP28 was held in the United Arab Emirates in November 2023, it marked the conclusion of the first '[global stock take](#)' of the world's efforts to address climate change under the [Paris Agreement](#). It confirmed the overarching aim to keep the global temperature limit of 1.5°C within reach.

The 'stocktake' calls on Parties to take actions towards achieving, at a global scale, a tripling of renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency improvements by 2030. The list also includes accelerating efforts towards the phase-down of unabated coal power, phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and other measures that drive the transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly, and equitable manner, with developed countries continuing to take the lead.

The Proposed Development will assist in achieving a reduction in global GHG emissions by providing an alternative solution to energy production through fossil fuel consumption, including coal.

3.2 EU Directives and Policies

This section summarises the previous policies and targets for renewable energy and GHG emissions in Europe up to 2030 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 16th 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 GHG emission by at least 55% on 1990 levels by 2030.

3.2.1 Renewable Energy Directive (RED) III

RED III aims to promote the expansion and increased uptake of energy from renewable sources across all sectors (including industry, transport, buildings, heating and cooling, and the production of hydrogen).

The revised Directive EU/2023/2413 entered into force on 20 November 2023. There will be an 18-month period for member states to transpose most of the directive's provisions into national law, with a shorter deadline of July 2024 for some provisions related to permitting for renewables.

The RED III aims to increase the share of renewable energy in the EU's overall energy consumption to 42.5% by 2030, with an additional 2.5% indicative top-up that would allow the overall share to reach 45%. There is a series of sectoral targets (for industry, transport, buildings, heating, and cooling), including some which would be legally binding. The industry sectoral target is the target relevant to the Proposed Development.

RED III states that there is a presumption that renewable energy plants, connection to the grid and storage are of overriding public interest. Except where:

- there is clear evidence that those projects have significant adverse effects on the environment which cannot be mitigated or compensated for, or
- Member States decide to restrict the application of that presumption in duly justified and specific circumstances to certain parts of their territory, certain technologies, or certain projects in accordance with the priorities set out in their national plans. Member States are required to inform the Commission of any such restrictions and the reasons therefor.

3.2.2 RECAST Renewable Energy Directive (RED II)

As part of its 'Clean Energy for all Europeans' package, the European Commission in 2016 proposed an update of the Renewable Energy Directive for the period 2021 – 2030 (RED II). In June 2018, an agreement was made in Europe between the European 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.

In July of 2021, the Commission proposed another revision to accelerate the take-up of renewables in the EU to assist in achieving the 2030 energy and climate objectives. The current directive sets a common target of 32% while the proposed revision seeks an increased 40% target as part of the package to deliver on the European Green Deal. In May of 2022 following the Communication on the REPowerEU Plan (COM/2022/230final) to further increase this target to 42.5% by 2030. It is expected that the adoption of this revision is Quarter 1 2023.

3.2.3 REPowerEU

In March 2022, the European Commission published REPowerEU – a Joint European Action for more affordable, secure, and sustainable energy. The main aim of the plan, called REPowerEU, is to make Europe completely independent from Russian fossil fuels by 2030 as a result of current geopolitical tensions in Ukraine. It received backing from the European Heads of State in the Versailles Declaration of 10th and 11th March 2022. On 18th May 2022, the Communication on the REPowerEU Plan (COM/2022/230final) was published.

REPowerEU provides an indication that member states will be required:

- Acceleration of the permit granting process (12 month permitting window for wind energy²)
- To ensure that the following items are of “overriding public interest³,” the planning, construction and operation of renewable energy plants, their connection to the grid and the related grid itself and Storage assets as defined in Article 2 of the Renewable Energy Directive⁴

In December of 2022, a provisional agreement among member states have resulted in a number of key objectives which include:

- increasing the resilience, security, and sustainability of the Union energy system through the needed decrease of dependence on fossil fuels
- diversification of energy supplies at Union level, including by increasing the uptake of renewables, energy efficiency and energy storage capacity.

New investments to assist member states in the rollout of REPowerEU will be funded through the Innovation Fund and ETS allowances. Key targeted investment objectives include:

- boosting energy efficiency in buildings and critical energy infrastructure

² European Commission. (2022). Commission Recommendation on speeding up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects and facilitating Power Purchase Agreements. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI_COM:C\(2022\)3219&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI_COM:C(2022)3219&from=EN)

³ Member States would be required to ensure that in the permit-granting process, the planning, construction and operation of renewable energy plants, their connection to the grid and the related grid itself, and storage assets are presumed to be the overriding public interest and serving public health and safety when balancing legal interests for the purposes of the Birds, Habitats, and Water Framework Directives.

⁴ European Commission (2018). Renewable Energy Directive. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018L2001&from=EN>

- decarbonising industry
- increasing production and uptake of sustainable biomethane, and renewable or fossil-free hydrogen
- increasing the share and accelerating the deployment of renewable energy
- improving energy infrastructure and facilities to meet immediate security of supply needs for gas, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), notably to enable diversification of supply in the interest of the Union as a whole.
- oil infrastructure and facilities necessary to meet immediate security of supply needs may be included in the REPowerEU chapter of a member state that has been subject to the exceptional temporary derogation due to its specific dependence on crude oil and geographical situation.
- addressing energy poverty
- incentivising a reduction of energy demand
- addressing internal and cross-border energy transmission and distribution bottlenecks
- supporting electricity storage
- accelerating the integration of renewable energy sources
- supporting zero emission transport and its infrastructure, including railways

Member states will be allocated funding in alignment with the member states dependence on fossil fuels and cohesion policies. Funding will be distributed through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) regulation.

On the 14th of February 2023, the European Parliament approved the agreement in plenary by a majority. This was signed on the 27th of February 2023 (Regulation (EU) 2023/435) and entered into force on the 1st of March 2023.

3.2.4 European Commission Recommendation on Speeding Up Permitting Renewables

In the European Commission's recommendation of 18th May 2022 on speeding up permit granting procedures for renewable energy projects and facilitating Power Purchase Agreements, the European Commission set out a series of recommendations to assist in the speeding up of the permitting process for renewables. In this recommendation, the EC noted that,

“The energy sector is responsible for over 75% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in the Union. Speeding up the production of energy from the development and deployment of renewable energy installations is therefore vital for the Union to reach its 2030 renewable energy target and for contributing to reaching the 2030 Union target of at least 55% GHG emission reductions in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2021/1119.”

Key recommendations include:

- To identify key go-to areas suitable land and sea areas for renewable energy projects. This land should be particularly suitable for the development of renewable energy (renewable go-to areas), while avoiding as much as possible environmentally valuable areas and prioritising *inter alia* degraded land not usable for agriculture

- to limit ‘exclusion zones’ where renewable energy cannot be developed to a necessary minimum.
- Member States should streamline environmental impact assessment requirements for renewable energy projects to the extent that is legally possible.
- Member States should implement long-term grid planning and investment consistent with the planned expansion of renewable energy production capacities, taking into account future demand and the objective of climate neutrality.
- Member States should establish simplified procedures for repowering existing renewable energy plants, including streamlined procedures for environmental assessments, and adopt a simple-notification procedure for their grid connections where no significant negative environmental or social impact is expected.
- Member States should set up a contact point tasked with regularly monitoring the main bottlenecks in the permit-granting process and addressing the issues encountered by renewable energy project developers.
- Member States should communicate to the Commission, every two years starting in March 2023, as part of the integrated national energy and climate progress reports to be submitted pursuant to Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council, all available detailed information on the state of implementation of this Recommendation.

3.2.5 Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 of 22 December 2022

On 22nd December of 2022, the European Council enacted Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 which set out a framework within the European Union to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy.

This framework set out a further immediate and temporary and short-term action for all EU Member States accelerate the rollout of renewable energy via a number of targeted actions which Member states could rapidly implement to streamline the permit granting process for renewable projects without the requirement of amendments to national procedures or legal systems.

Evidencing general policy support for renewable energy projects is the Council agreement that:

“the planning, construction and operation of plants and installations for the production of renewable energy is presumed to be in the overriding public interest. This will allow such projects to benefit from a simplified assessment for a number of environmental obligations included in specific EU directives”.

3.2.6 European Climate Law Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 (European Climate Law)

The European Climate Law Regulation⁵ was established on 30th June 2021 and came into effect on 29th July 2021. This Regulation sets into law the goal that was set out in the European Green Deal and provides a legally binding, irreversible, and responsible pathway

⁵ European Climate Law Regulation. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021R1119#:~:text=This%20Regulation%20establishes%20a%20framework,sinks%20regulated%20in%20Union%20law.>

for the EU to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. In addition to this overarching legal objective, the Regulation also sets a number of other key objectives:

- Measures to track the progress of EU member states and adjust actions where required accordingly to reach the overarching 2050 target.
- A 55% reduction of net emissions of GHGs as compared to 1990 by 2030 (including clarity on the contribution of emissions reductions and removals).
- A process to set a 2040 climate target which will also take into account the indicative greenhouse gas budget between years 2030 to 2050.
- On the 6th of February 2024, the Commission published its communication on a 2040 climate target alongside an impact assessment. Based on the public consultation advice from the scientific advisory board and the impact assessment, the Commission recommends a net greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 90% by 2040 relative to 1990.
- The establishment of a European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change that will provide independent scientific advice going forward. This advisory Board was established in 2021.
- Stronger provisions on climate change adaptation in alignment with the Paris Agreement. Such provisions include adaptive capacity of member states, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability on climate change. Member states will be required to adopt comprehensive national adaptation strategies and plans based on climate change and vulnerability analysis and most recent scientific evidence.
- A commitment by the EU to both engage with more sectors and to prepare a sector specific roadmap demonstrating a path to climate neutrality in different areas of the economy.

Section 34 of this Regulation is of relevance to the Proposed Development:

*“Member States and the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should, inter alia, take into account: the contribution of the transition to climate neutrality to public health, the quality of the environment, the well-being of citizens, the prosperity of society, employment and the competitiveness of the economy; the energy transition, **strengthened energy security and the tackling of energy poverty**; food security and affordability; the development of sustainable and smart mobility and transport systems; fairness and solidarity across and within Member States, in light of their economic capability, national circumstances, such as the specificities of islands, and the need for convergence over time; the need to make the transition just and socially fair through appropriate education and training programmes; best available and most recent scientific evidence, in particular the findings reported by the IPCC; the need to integrate climate change related risks into investment and planning decisions; cost-effectiveness and technological neutrality in achieving greenhouse gas emission reductions and removals and increasing resilience; and progression over time in environmental integrity and level of ambition.”* (Own emphasis added)

3.3 Security of Supply Policy

3.3.1 Policy Statement on Security of Electricity Supply

The Policy Statement on Security of Electricity Supply was published by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in November 2021. The Policy Statement sets out a number of updates to national policy in the context of the Programme for Government commitments relevant to the electricity sector, planning authorities and developers.

The Programme for Government commits Ireland 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. In order to contribute to the achievement of these targets, the Government has committed that up to 80% of electricity consumption will come from renewable sources by 2030 on a pathway to net zero emissions. It is expected that most of the renewable energy generated by 2030 will be from wind and solar. Much of the older high-emitting sources, such as peat, coal, and oil, are expected to close over the coming years, with the exception of a reserve for when needed, e.g., to balance the system in times of high demands and low wind/solar generation.

In Ireland, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities has statutory responsibility, under S.I. 60 of 2005, to ensure security of electricity supply. It has the duty to monitor security of electricity supply and to take such measures as it considers necessary to protect security of supply.

The Policy Statement outlines a number of key challenges to ensuring security of electricity supply including,

- ensuring adequate electricity generation capacity, storage, grid infrastructure, interconnection and system services are put in place to meet demand – including at periods of peak demand.
- developing appropriate market rules to incentivise investment and the behaviours of electricity suppliers and consumers in order to deliver greater complementarity between demand and generation.
- developing grid infrastructure and operating the electricity system in a safe and reliable manner.
- ensuring a diversity of fuel supply sources; and
- ensuring resilience from cyber security threats.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications is also carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland's electricity and natural gas systems for the period out to 2030 in the context of net zero emissions by 2050. This review will inform future policy in relation to security of electricity and gas supply.

Within the policy statement and in relation to renewable energy and security of supply, the Government recognises that:

- ensuring security of electricity supply continues to be a national priority as the electricity system decarbonises towards net zero emissions.
- the all-island single electricity market has an important role in delivering new generation capacity.

- there is a need for very significant investment in additional flexible conventional electricity generation, electricity grid infrastructure, interconnection, and storage in order to ensure security of electricity supply.

3.3.2 Review of the Security of Energy Supply of Ireland's Electricity and Natural Gas Systems (Consultation)

The Consultation document on the review of the Security of Ireland's Electricity Supply was published by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in September 2022. The DECC has carried out research to inform the review, with supporting technical analysis conducted by Cambridge Economic Policy associates Ltd (CEPA).

The document outlines that; *"Despite significant improvements in recent years, Ireland's energy usage per dwelling remains higher than the EU average."*

The consultation document outlines that the *"share of electricity from renewable energy increased almost six-fold between 2005-2020, from 7% to 42%, 35% increase in 15 years."* However, the demand for electricity continues to rise and is forecast to continue to grow over the next 10 years.

The document further states that; *"The share of renewable energy within a country's energy mix also has an important bearing on its energy security of supply. In order to reduce its import dependency, Ireland must increase the level of energy from a diverse number of renewable energy sources. In addition to having a diverse renewables portfolio, the development of storage, demand side response and interconnection will support Ireland's decarbonisation and energy security agenda."*

The Proposed Development is classified as a Renewable Energy Plant⁶ which has general policy support from the EU as set out in the REPowerEU Plan of May 2022. REPowerEU, Fit for 55, RED III and the European Green Deal all provide strong policy support from the EU for renewable energy.

4.0 Relevant Planning Policy

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 Programme for Government (2020) 'Our Shared Future'⁷ 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

⁶REPowerEU https://commission.europa.eu/publications/key-documents-repowerEU_en (accessed 16/6/2023)

⁷ Department of the Taoiseach (2020), Programme for Government: Our Shared Future.

annum reduction in overall GHG 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 onshore wind sources, as detailed in the following section.

4.1.1 Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework

As a strategic development framework, Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework (NPF), 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 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.

Section 9.2 Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Low Carbon Economy of the NPF describes the national endeavour with respect to Climate Action and Planning. It is detailed that the Government is committed to a long-term climate policy based on the adoption of a series of national plans over the period to 2050, informed by UN and EU policy. This is being progressed through the National Mitigation Plan and the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework, both of which will be updated and reviewed periodically.

In addition to legally binding targets agreed at EU level, it is a national objective for Ireland to transition to be a competitive low carbon, economy by the year 2050. The National Policy Position 42 establishes the fundamental national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, guided by a long-term vision based on:

- an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and
- in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Meeting our commitments will require investment and ambitious and effective action across all sectors, as well as societal behavioural change. The planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at local level. Planning legislation also requires different levels of the planning process to address climate change. In this instance, we submit that the Proposed Development meets the requirements of National Policy Objective (NPO) 54:

National Planning 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.

Section 9.2 of the NPF also provides a section on Energy Policy and Planning which describes that Ireland's national energy policy is focused on three pillars: (1) sustainability, (2) security of supply and (3) competitiveness. The Government recognises that Ireland must reduce GHG emissions from the energy sector by at least 80% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels, while at the same time ensuring security of supply of competitive energy sources to our citizens and businesses.

Furthermore, it is emphasised 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, smartgrids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy.
- and Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a low carbon society.

With respect to the above, the Proposed Development is also in accordance with NPO 55:

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.

Regarding 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. It is stated that:

“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.”

The Proposed Development meets the requirements of National Policy Objective 21:

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.

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

“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.”

RPO 9: support the transition to low carbon and clean energy: Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050.

The Proposed Development supports the *diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services* that are helping to address *climate change and sustainability*. The Proposed Development will also directly result in benefits to the local economy through job creation. The construction phase of the Proposed Development has potential to create between approximately 104 and 274 jobs. The community will also be supported using the community benefit fund which will invest into the local communities.

The Proposed Development therefore contributes substantially to the fulfilment of the objectives in the National Planning Framework, namely National Planning Objective 21, 54 and 55.

4.1.2 Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP) published in February 2018, in tandem with 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 to achieve the National Strategic Outcomes as set out within the NPF.

The NDP outlines several 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 RESS 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.

On 4th October 2021, the Government published an updated 'National Development Plan 2021 – 2030'. Chapter 3 Climate Action and the Environment provides a relevant section with respect to Investing for low-carbon, resilient electricity systems. In effect, the NDP Review commits to increasing the share of renewable electricity up to 80% by 2030.

NSO 8 - Chapter 13: Transition to a Climate-Neutral and Climate-Resilient Society describes that:

“The next 10 years are critical if we are to address the climate crisis and ensure a safe and bright future for the planet, and all of us on it. In Ireland, we have significantly stepped up our climate ambition. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits us to a 51% reduction in our overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and to achieving net zero emissions no later than by 2050.”

Furthermore, it is stated that:

“The investment priorities included in this chapter must be delivered to meet the targets set out in the current and future Climate Action Plans, and to achieve our climate objectives. The investment priorities represent a decisive shift towards the achievement of a decarbonised society, demonstrating the Government’s unequivocal commitment to securing a carbon neutral future.”

To assist the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to fund its obligations under the Climate Action Plan, to deliver the National Broadband Plan and in allocating the additional €5 billion from 10 years of Carbon Tax receipts, it will receive a total indicative allocation of €12.9 billion over the 2021-2030 period.”

Further annual ceilings for the Department beyond 2025 will be agreed on a rolling 5-year basis from 2022. It is further stated that public capital investment choices over the next 10 years must not only contribute to the objective of a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 but also lay the pathway to achieve the national climate objective of net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. With respect to the above, the following Strategic Investment Priorities relevant to wind farm development are provided:

Strategic Investment Priorities – Renewable Energy

Regular Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions will deliver competitive levels of onshore wind and solar electricity generation which indicatively could be up to 2.5 GW of grid scale solar and up to 8 GW of onshore wind by 2030.

The RESS will also support the delivery of up to 5 GW of additional offshore renewable electricity generation by 2030.

The above highlights that subject to the appropriate planning and environmental assessments, onshore wind farm development would support the achievement of national objectives and related investment in renewable electricity generation. The following sections provide the relevant information with respect to the, the Climate Action, and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and the Climate Action Plan 2023.

It is submitted that the Proposed Development if realised would provide a significant contribution with respect to achieving national renewable energy and climate action targets, as set out in the NPF. The Proposed Development would provide an 8-no. turbine wind farm capable of generating a total of 52.8 to 57.6MW of power (for assessment purposes in the climate chapter to evidence predicted benefits) by means of renewable technology, therefore, contributing to NPO 54 and 55 of the NPF.

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

In 2021, the Government of Ireland approved the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 which aims for net-zero emissions by 2050 and an Interim Target of 51% reduction to be reached by 2030, relative to a baseline of 2018.

The Act is 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. The Government is required to adopt a series of economy-wide five-year carbon budgets, with the first two five-year carbon budgets correlating to the Interim Target. 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 provides the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments and to become a leader in addressing climate change. 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 to realise our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations.

Section 15 of this Act states that Local authorities and the Board shall perform its functions in a manner consistent with—

- the most recent approved climate action plan,
- the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy,
- the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans,
- the furtherance of the national climate objective, and
- the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State in so far as practicable.

4.1.4 Climate Action Plan 2023

The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) is the second annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019. This plan marks a significant milestone as it is the first to be developed in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. Additionally, it follows the introduction of economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings in 2022.

On 21 December 2022, the plan was officially launched. Its primary objective is to implement the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings while providing a clear roadmap for decisive action. The plan aims to cut our emissions in half by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050, as outlined in the Programme for Government (2022). By placing climate solutions at the heart of Ireland's social and economic development, the

CAP2023 outlines how the country can expedite the necessary actions to address the climate crisis.

CAP23 follows the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, which commits Ireland to a **legally binding target of net-zero GHG emissions no later than 2050, and a reduction of 51% by 2030**. These targets are a key pillar of the Programme for Government. Among the most important measures in CAP23 is to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030. Notably Section 11 Electricity of CAP23 provides a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of providing 9 GW Onshore wind by 2030. CAP23 identifies 6 vital high impact sectors:

- Powering renewables, with a reduction in emission of 75% by 2030.
- Building Better, with a reduction in emission of 40-45% by 2030
- Transforming how we travel, with a reduction in emission of 50% by 2030.
- Making family farms more sustainable, with a reduction in emission of 25% by 2030
- Greening business and enterprise, with a reduction in emission of 75% by 2030
- Changing our land use

Relevant to onshore wind farm development, the following actions are also provided:

- EL/23/3 Publish a roadmap for the development and implementation of Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies.
- EL/23/4 Prepare new draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines for onshore renewables.
- EL/23/5 Complete analysis to update Shaping Our Electricity Future to accommodate 80% renewables and align with carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings for electricity.
- EL/23/6 Ensure electricity generation grid connection policies and regular rounds of connection offers which facilitate timely connecting of renewables, provides a locational signal and supports flexible technologies.
- EL/23/10 Deliver onshore and offshore RESS auctions as per the annual RESS auction calendar.

The pace of individual, technological, scientific, societal, and economic change will not be precisely in line with our assumptions today. To accommodate this, CAP23 will be updated every 12 months, in line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and following consultation with key stakeholders. These updates will be informed by the latest analyses and by Ireland's performance against targets; and will include any new or corrective actions that may be needed to stay on track towards the overall 2030 targets and the ultimate objective of achieving a transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and carbon neutral economy no later than 2050.

4.1.5 Climate Action Plan 2024 (Consultation Draft)

The Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) is the third annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan. The Plan was approved by Government on 20 December 2023, subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, and public consultation.

CAP24 reiterates the European Green Deal commitment to delivering net-zero GHG emissions at EU level by 2050; with Ireland committed to achieving a 51% reduction in emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050 and the need for action to reduce emissions to be significantly accelerated in the period to 2030.

Climate Action Plan 2024 sets out the roadmap to deliver on Ireland's climate ambition. It aligns with the legally binding economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings that were agreed by Government in July 2022. It sets out further policies, measures, and actions, including for electricity:

- Develop a methodology to incentivise and enable industrial heating facilities to participate in flexible demand initiatives from 2024.
- Issue a recommendations paper on market options to incentivise Long Duration Energy Storage.

It states that:

'the electricity sector continues to face an immense challenge in meeting its requirements under the sectoral emissions ceiling, as the decarbonisation of other sectors, including transport, heating, and industry, relies to a significant degree on electrification. The deployment rates of renewable energy and grid infrastructure required to meet the carbon budget programme for electricity is unprecedented and requires urgent action across all actors to align with the national targets.'

CAP24 reiterates the targets of

- increasing renewable generation to supply 80% of demand by 2030 through the accelerated expansion of onshore wind and solar energy generation, developing offshore renewable generation, and delivering additional grid infrastructure.
- delivering 9 GW from onshore wind by 2030

During its operation, it is estimated for assessment purposes that the Proposed Development will generate 52.8 to 57.6 MW of electricity which would be sufficient to supply between 33,037 to 39,645 Irish households with renewable electricity per year, based on the average Irish household using 4.2 MWh of electricity. The Proposed Development has the potential to displace between 1,678,665 and 1,834,432 tonnes of CO₂ over the operational lifetime (35 years). Thus, this energy will be used to offset the same amount of energy that would otherwise be generated from energy sources with higher GHG emissions. Therefore, the Proposed Development supports the delivery of targets within CAP 23 and CAP 24.

4.1.6 Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections (2021-2040)

In 2022, the EPA published a report, titled 'Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections 2021-2040', provides an updated assessment of Ireland's total projected GHG emissions out to 2040. This includes an assessment of progress towards achieving its National ambitions under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and EU emission reduction targets for 2030 as set under the EU Effort Sharing Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/842 (as amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/857).

The Key Findings from the report are as follows:

- Urgent implementation of all climate plans and policies, plus further new measures, are needed for Ireland to meet the 51% emissions reduction target and put Ireland on track for climate neutrality by 2050.
- Ireland can meet its non-ETS EU targets of a 30 % emission reduction by 2030 (compared to 2005) assuming implementation of planned policies and measures and

the use of the flexibilities available. These include a land use flexibility using the Climate Action Plan 2021 afforestation rate of 8,000 hectares per annum.

- The gap between the 'Existing Measures' and 'Additional Measures' scenarios in these projections highlights that the current pace of implementation will not achieve the change required to meet the Climate Act targets. Faster implementation of 'Additional Measures' is needed to close this gap.
- Carbon budgets proposed by the Climate Change Advisory Council have recently been approved by the Oireachtas for the periods 2021-25, 2026-30 and 2031-35. The Projections highlight that there is currently a significant gap between the budgets and the projected emissions over the budget periods. This gap will need to be addressed very quickly if Ireland is to stay within the Carbon Budgets.
- Under the Additional Measures scenario, renewable energy is projected to increase to 78 % of electricity generation by 2030 with emissions from the Energy Industry decreasing by 10 % per annum from 2021-30. Increased coal use from 2021 and growing energy demand, including from data centres, threaten to negatively impact achievement of National targets, particularly for the first carbon budget period.
- Under the Existing Measures scenario emissions are projected to increase by 1.9 % over the 2020-2030 period. A methane emissions reduction of almost 30 % is required to achieve a 22 % reduction in Agriculture emissions compared to 2018, as committed to in the 2021 Climate Action Plan. The sector must clearly set out how this will be achieved to address uncertainty regarding its ability to deliver even the lower end of the range of its sectoral targets within the ever-shortening timeframe to 2030.
- The end of COVID travel restrictions is projected to result in transport emissions increasing by 18-19 % from 2020 to 2022. Emissions from the sector are projected to reduce to 39 % below 2018 levels by 2030 and achieve a 31.7 % renewable transport share if the additional measures in plans and policies are implemented, this includes over 940,000 electric vehicles on the road by 2030, increased biofuel blend rates and measures to support more sustainable transport.
- Spending more time at home due to hybrid working and the increasing cost of fossil fuels highlights the need for our houses to become far more efficient. Implementing currently planned measures for the installation of 680,000 heat-pumps by 2030 as well as retrofitting 500,000 homes is projected to achieve a 41.5 % reduction in residential emissions in 2030 (compared to 2018).

During its operation, it is estimated for the purposes of assessing the benefits that the Proposed Development will generate 52.8 to 57.6MW of electricity which would be sufficient to supply 33,037 to 39,645 Irish households with renewable electricity per year, based on the average Irish household using 4.2 MWh of electricity⁸. Thus, this energy will be used to offset the same amount of energy that would otherwise be generated from other energy sources with higher GHG emissions and will contribute to progress towards achieving National ambitions under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and EU emission reduction targets for 2030 as set under the EU Effort Sharing Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/842 (as amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/857).

⁸ This figure is available from the March 2017 CER 'Review of Review of Typical Domestic Consumption Values for Electricity and Gas Customers'. Based on the range of feedback received through the consultation, from price comparison websites, Non-Governmental Organisations, suppliers and ESNB, the CER has reviewed the options presented in its consultation paper and has decided to use a single revised average value for typical consumption for both electricity and gas. These

4.2 Section 28 Guidelines

Section 28 of the PDA provides for national guidance to planning authorities in carrying out their functions.

Section 28 of the PDA requires that planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála have regard to Ministerial Guidelines and to comply with any specific planning policy requirements contained therein, in the performance of their functions.

4.2.1 DoEHLG Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006)

The WEG (2006) published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government (DoEHLG) offer guidance 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 been assessed against the provisions of the WEG 2006, in terms of design and siting. The Proposed Development is in line with the recommendations as set out in the WEG, please refer to **Table 3-1** below for further details.

4.2.2 Draft Wind Energy Guidelines (2019)

The Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines were published in December 2019 for public consultation. The guidelines will supersede the 2006 guidelines if formally adopted by the government. The revised guidelines aim to apply consistency across all Renewable Energy Strategies with regard to Development Management objectives. **Table 3-1** below sets out the compliance of the Proposed Development to both 2006 and 2019 Guidelines.

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

- Revised set back distances. Four times the tip height (720m) 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).
- Section 7.16 of the draft guidelines confirm a policy of zero shadow flicker at nearby existing dwellings or other affected properties. The draft guidelines state that a condition "Should" be attached to all planning permissions to ensure that there will be no shadow flicker at any existing nearby dwelling.
- 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 Development 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 Proposed

figures are 4,200 kWh for electricity and 11,000 kWh for gas. Obligation was then placed on CER accredited price comparison web sites and relevant industry stakeholders, to update the common industry figures to the revised figures by 1st of August 2017.

Development has adhered to the Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines, published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (December 2019), where it is considered to represent best practice.

The Draft Guidelines are referred to in Chapter 9 – 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 and are not considered to represent current best practice. As such, the noise limits from the 2006 guidelines form the basis of the assessment.

Table 4-1 Compliance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) and Draft Wind Energy Guidelines (2019)

Topic Area	Requirement, Compliance	Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006)	Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines December 2019
Noise	Requirement	<p>A lower limit of 45dB(A) or a maximum increase of 5dB(A) above background noise at nearby noise sensitive locations.</p> <p>In low noise environments where background noise is less than 30 dB(A), it is recommended that the daytime level of the LA90, 10min of the wind energy development noise be limited to an absolute level within the range of 35-40 dB(A).</p> <p>Noise unlikely to be a significant problem where the distance from the nearest turbine to any noise sensitive property is more than 500 metres.</p>	<p>Relative Rated Noise Limit (RRNL) in the range of 35-43dB(A) shall apply, while not exceeding the background noise level by more than 5dB(A) with an upper limit of 43 dB(A).</p> <p>500m setback from individual properties.</p>
	Compliance	<p>Complies with 2006 Guidelines. Please refer to Chapter 10 of the EIAR with respect to noise and the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development.</p>	<p>These guidelines have yet to be finalised, have not been adopted and are not considered best practice. The 2006 Guidelines, as supplemented by the ESTU-R-97 and IOA methodologies described below, are considered best practice and have been applied in this assessment.</p>
Shadow Flicker	Requirement	<p>10 rotor diameters from each turbine. If a turbine cannot be relocated, automatic shutoff during</p>	<p>No shadow flicker at any existing nearby dwelling or other relevant existing affected sensitive property.</p>

Topic Area	Requirement, Compliance	Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006)	Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines December 2019
		<p>periods of potential shadow flicker should occur.</p>	
	Compliance	<p>This results in a distance of between 1550 and 1620m.</p> <p>It is an objective of the developer to have zero shadow flicker at all nearby properties. Mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project to avoid shadow flicker in line with the guidelines.</p> <p>Please refer to Chapter 11 of the EIAR with respect to Shadow Flicker and the Proposed Development. The applicants are committed to implementing a zero-shadow flicker approach.</p>	<p>It is an objective of the developer to have zero shadow flicker at all nearby properties. Mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project to avoid shadow flicker in line with the guidelines.</p> <p>Please refer to Chapter 11 of the EIAR with respect to Shadow Flicker and the Proposed Development. The applicants are committed to implementing a zero-shadow flicker approach.</p>
Visual Disturbance	Requirement	<p>No specific setback distance listed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory, minimum setback of 500m from nearest turbine to the nearest point of the curtilage of any residential receptor. • 4 tip heights from each turbine to the curtilage of the nearest residential receptors– this results in a distance of 720m (180m x4) for the maximum tip height and 700m (175m x 4) for the minimum tip height.
	Compliance	<p>Complies with 2006 Guidelines.</p>	<p>In this regard the proposed layout has achieved a minimum separation distance of approximately in excess of 4 times tip height between turbine locations and the closest dwellings for all turbines within the range, with the exception of</p>

Topic Area	Requirement, Compliance	Wind Development Guidelines (2006) Energy	Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines December 2019
			<p>a property where the occupier has a financial involvement in the wind farm development and is 705 m from the nearest proposed wind turbine.</p> <p>The applicant is committed to implementing a zero-shadow flicker approach in line with the 2019 Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines. The implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, namely a zero-shadow flicker approach, will ensure that shadow flicker at all buildings is eliminated resulting in no impacts to receptors.</p> <p>Please refer to chapter 11 of the EIAR for further details.</p>
Proximity to Roads and Railways	Requirement	<p>Best practice indicates that it is advisable to achieve a safety set back from National and Regional roads and railways of a distance equal to the height of the turbine and blade.</p> <p>180m from nearest turbine for the maximum set back within the range.</p>	<p>Although wind turbines erected in accordance with standard engineering practice are stable structures, best practice indicates that it is advisable to achieve a safety set back from National and Regional roads and railways of a distance equal to the height of the turbine to the tip of the blade plus 10%.</p> <p>198m from nearest turbine for the maximum set back within the range.</p>
	Compliance	<p>The nearest National or Regional Road to the Proposed Development is the N52.</p> <p>All turbines comply with this requirement.</p>	<p>Although wind turbines erected in accordance with standard engineering practice are stable structures, best practice indicates that it is advisable to achieve a safety setback from National and Regional roads and railways of a distance equal to the height of the turbine to the</p>

Topic Area	Requirement, Compliance	Wind Development Guidelines (2006) Energy	Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines December 2019
			<p>tip of the blade plus 10%, with 198m from nearest turbine for the maximum setback within the range. The nearest National or Regional Road is the N52. and it can be confirmed that all turbines comply with this requirement and also allow provide for additional setback to facilitate the realignment of N52. The minimum setback from the closest turbine to the N52 is 225m.</p> <p>All turbines therefore comply with this requirement.</p>
Proximity to power lines	Requirement	<p>Adequate clearance between structures and overhead power lines as specified by the electricity undertaker should be provided. There is a statutory obligation to notify the electricity distributor of Proposed Developments within 23 meters of any transmission or distribution line.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23m from nearest turbine to any transmission distribution line. 	<p>They advise that the distance between an overhead transmission line (110kV, 22kV or 400kV) and a commercial wind turbine should not be less than three and a half rotor diameters unless EirGrid have agreed a reduction based on a risk assessment. The minimum clearance for all turbines and overhead transmission lines must be falling distance (measured from the edge of the foundation) plus an additional flashover distance for the relevant voltage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum clearance of between 542.5m to 567m
	Compliance	<p>The nearest power line to the Proposed Development is 1.9km to the north of the Northern Cluster. In this regard the Proposed Development has achieved the required distances.</p>	<p>The proposed rotor diameter ranges from 155m to 162m. which would equate to a minimum clearance of between 542.5m to 567m.</p> <p>The nearest power line to the Proposed Development is 1.9km to the north of the Northern Cluster. In this regard the Proposed Development has achieved the required distances.</p>

4.2.3 Spatial Planning and National Roads, Guidelines for Planning Authorities.

The Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines were prepared in the context of the delivery of the National Spatial Strategy and actions identified in Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government has issued these guidelines under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to the guidelines in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

The guidelines set out planning policy considerations relating to development affecting national roads (including motorways, national primary and national secondary roads) outside the 50/60 kmh speed limit zones for cities, towns, and villages.

The guidelines have been developed by following a number of key principles and aim to facilitate a well-informed, integrated, and consistent approach that affords maximum support for the goal of achieving and maintaining a safe and efficient network of national roads in the broader context of sustainable development strategies, thereby facilitating continued economic growth and development throughout the country. One of the 'Key Messages' within these guidelines is the need for development plans to "*include policies which seek to maintain and protect the safety, capacity and efficiency of national roads and associated junctions, avoiding the creation of new accesses and the intensification of existing accesses to national roads where a speed limit greater than 50 kmh applies*".

Section 2.5 of the Guidelines outlines policy approaches for development plans and local area plans as follows:

Lands adjoining National Roads to which speed limits greater than 60 kmh apply: The policy of the planning authority will be to avoid the creation of any additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to national roads to which speed limits greater than 60 kmh apply. This provision applies to all categories of development, including individual houses in rural areas, regardless of the housing circumstances of the applicant.

Transitional Zones: Where the plan area incorporates sections of national roads on the approaches to or exit from urban centres that are subject to a speed limit of 60 kmh before a lower 50 kmh limit is encountered – otherwise known as transitional zones - the plan may provide for a limited level of direct access to facilitate orderly urban development. Any such proposal must, however, be subject to a road safety audit carried out in accordance with the NRA's requirements and a proliferation of such entrances, which would lead to a diminution in the role of such zones, must be avoided.

Lands adjoining National Roads within 50 kmh speed limits: Access to national roads will be considered by planning authorities in accordance with normal road safety, traffic management and urban design criteria for built up areas.

Section 2.6 of the Guidelines outline provision where a relaxation in these policies may apply in '**exceptional circumstances**', including:

- Developments of National and Regional Strategic Importance, and
- Lightly trafficked sections of National Secondary Routes.

The Proposed Development, as confirmed by An Bord Pleanála is a Strategic Infrastructure Development and of National Strategic Importance. The Proposed Development will require a new access onto the N52 to facilitate the construction of the Proposed Development. Once construction is complete this access point will only be used to facilitate maintenance works. Any works to the N52 will be carried out in agreement with the TII and Local Authorities and details of the proposed works will be agreed as part of the Construction and Traffic Management Plan which will be submitted and agreed prior to any commencement of works on site.

4.3 Best Practice Guidelines

4.3.1 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.

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 Proposed Development, specific regard has been taken of this guidance document.

Details of the public and stakeholder consultation process carried out throughout the design of the Proposed Development is detailed in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1.4 of the accompanying EIAR.

4.3.2 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.

The Applicant appointed a Community Liaison Office (CLO) to engage with the public throughout the development of the Project as a whole. The CLO was responsible for communication between the public and the developer's team. The CLO's role included:

- Door to door consultation with community members within 1.6km of the Proposed Development.
- Distribution of project materials to community members, including a leaflet and letter drop to ensure locals were made aware of the details of the Proposed Development and processes involved. Dedicated contact details were provided with circulated materials so members of the public could directly contact the project team.
- Follow up meetings with community members where required. Two facilities have been provided for the local community to allow both privacy and a forum to voice their views on the Proposed Development through the provision of the VCR and the use of the Proposed Development consultation feedback form.
- Liaison between local residents and the project team and communication of any project updates.

This process was commenced as early as possible in order to inform the design of the Proposed Development and to inform the EIA process. A dedicated website was also set up to allow for further open communication between the applicant and community throughout the iterative design process and run-up to the application submission.

Observations and issues that arose during the scoping and consultation process have informed the design, assessment and mitigation measures proposed as part of this Proposed Development. Of significance here is movement of turbines and associated infrastructure during the design evolution and the commitment to zero shadow flicker at dwellings in proximity to the Proposed Development in compliance with the 2019 draft Wind Energy Guidelines.

Please also refer to Chapter 1 and Appendix 1.4 of the EIAR for further detail.

4.4 Regional Planning Policy

4.4.1 Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands region is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region. The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework and National Development Plan and the economic policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Regions. The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the EMRA meeting on the 3rd of May 2019 decided to make the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region on the 28th of June 2019, in accordance with section 24 (9) of the Act. The RSES was subject to a Ministerial Direction issued on 14th January 2020.

With respect to renewable energy requirements within the Eastern and Midlands region, section 2.2 Vision and Key Principles highlights that:

“A key challenge facing the Region, along with all other regions, is the transition to a low carbon society. For the RSES this means five primary areas of transition which are at the core of the Strategy:

- *sustainable development patterns which promote compact growth, reduce transport demand, and encourage low carbon transport modes.*
- *sustainable transport systems (people and freight).*
- *carbon storing and sequestering land uses.*
- *energy efficient buildings and industry; and*
- *renewable energy.”*

In relation to the RSES’s ‘Key Principles’, it is outlined that the Strategy is underpinned by key cross-cutting principles that reflect the three pillars of sustainability; Social, Environmental and Economic, and expressed in a manner which best reflects the challenges and opportunities of the Region. The central need is for the RSES to be people focused, as ‘quality of life’ encapsulates strong economic output and stability, good environmental performance, and a good standard of living for all. The following key principle is provided in relation to Climate Action:

Climate Action

The need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.

Section 2.3 Regional Strategic Outcomes seeks to determine at a regional scale how best to achieve the shared goals set out in the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF. To this end, the Strategy sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), which are aligned with international, EU and national policy and which in turn set the framework for city and county development plans. Thus, the RSES can assist local authorities in aligning with EU priorities to leverage funding and partnership opportunities. The following RSO is significant with respect to onshore wind farm development and related renewable energy generation:

RS0 9 - Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy:

Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050.

Section 7.9; Climate Change of Chapter 7 Environment and Climate provides a significant section on Decarbonising the Energy Sector. It is described that the Region will need to shift from its reliance on using fossil fuels and natural gas as its main energy source to a more diverse range of low and zero-carbon sources, including renewable energy and secondary heat sources. Decentralised energy will be critical to the Region’s energy supply and will ensure that the Region can become more self-sufficient in relation to its energy needs. It is further stated that generating electricity supply from indigenous renewable sources requires:

- facilitating the provision of appropriate renewable energy infrastructure and technologies and deeper.
- cooperation with Northern Ireland and the EU.

- expansion and upgrading of the grid with the aim of increasing the share of variable renewable electricity.
- that the all-island system can accommodate.
- Onshore wind, bioenergy, solar and offshore energy.
- Effective community engagement including support for micro generation.
- Moving from carbon intense fossil fuel generation to lower emissions fuels.
- Increasing the use of electricity and bioenergy to heat our homes and fuel our transport.
- The need to ensure sufficient electricity to meet increased demand.

The Strategy supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the Region. This includes the use of wind energy – both onshore and offshore. The following relevant Regional Policy Objectives (RPO) are also provided:

RPO 7.36

Planning policy at local authority level shall reflect and adhere to the principles and planning guidance set out in Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government publications relating to ‘Wind Energy Development’ and the DCCAE Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland on Guidelines for Community Engagement and any other relevant guidance which may be issued in relation to sustainable energy provisions.

Section 4.8 Rural Places: Towns, Villages and the Countryside of Chapter 4 People and Places provides a relevant section with respect to ‘Enabling and Sustaining the Rural Economy’. It is described therein that Energy production, including renewable energy in the form of wind, solar and biomass have to date largely been provided in rural areas and the location of future renewable energy production is likely to be met in rural areas. The following RPO is also of significance in this regard:

RPO 6.7:

Support local authorities to develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bioeconomy, tourism, 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.

The Proposed Development 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.

The Proposed Development will support the delivery of 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. The Proposed Development will support the overall transition to a low carbon society as set out in the RSES. The Proposed Development will provide an 8no. turbine wind farm capable of generating an estimated 52.8 to 57.6 MW of power (for assessment to evidence the predicted benefits) by means of renewable technology, therefore, contributing to RSO 9 of the RSES.

4.5 Local Planning Policy

4.5.1 Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (WCDP) sets out the Council's proposed policies (CPO's) and objectives for the development of the County over the Plan period. The WCDP seeks to develop and improve, in a sustainable manner, the social, economic, environmental, and cultural assets of the County.

This section provides an overview of compliance with key planning policy and related objectives in the WCDP.

4.5.1.1 Wind Energy Policies Objectives

The Plan identifies the importance of wind energy as a renewable energy source in achieving national targets in relation to reductions in fossil fuel dependency and greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan seeks to enable renewable and wind energy resources of County Westmeath to be harnessed in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Map no. 69 of the CDP, outlines the Wind Energy Capacity for the County, only a small area at Uisneach, is identified as having no wind energy capacity. The entire County is designated as having either no or low capacity for wind energy. See **Figure 1** below.

The Plan identifies the "*preferred locations for large scale energy production, in the form of windfarms, is onto cutover cutaway peatlands in the County, subject to nature conservation and habitat protection requirements being fully addressed*".

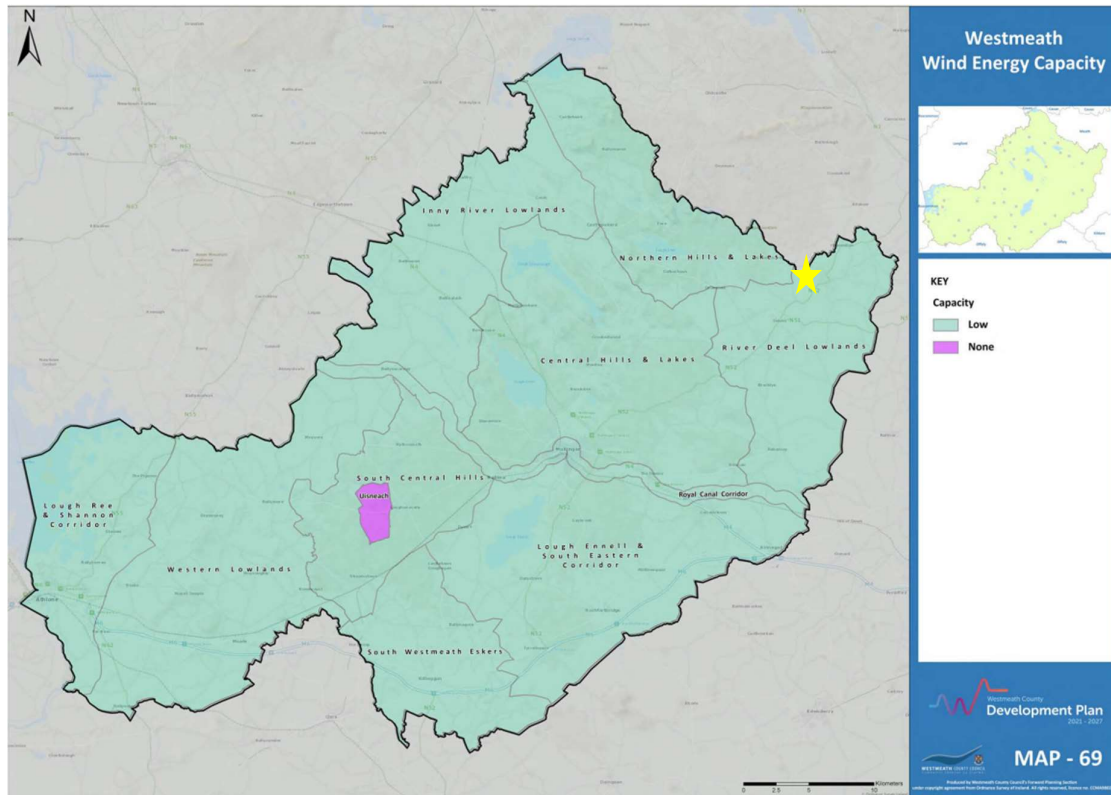


Figure 1: Wind Energy Capacity for Westmeath (Map no. 69 of the CDP) (site denoted by yellow star).

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.142: Have regard to the principles and planning guidance set out in Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government publications relating to 'Wind Energy Development' and the DCCA Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland and any other relevant guidance which may be issued in relation to sustainable energy provisions.

CPO 10.143: Ensure the security of energy supply by supporting the potential of the wind energy resources of the County in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development of the area. (CPO 10.133 in the Draft WCDP, re-numbered after ministerial direction).

CPO 10.145⁹: To strictly direct large-scale energy production projects, in the form of wind farms, onto cutover cutaway peatlands in the County, subject to environmental, landscape, habitats and wildlife protection requirements being addressed. In the context of this policy, industrial scale/large-scale energy production projects are defined as follows:

Projects that meet or exceed any of the following criteria:

- Height: over 100m to blade tip, or
- Scale: More than five turbines, or

⁹ Policy on large-scale energy production projects (CPO 10.135 in the Draft Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027) which was renumbered CPO 10.145 in the adopted CDP.

- Output: Having a total output of greater than 5MW
- Developments sited on peatlands have the potential to increase overall carbon losses. Proposals for such development should demonstrate that the following has been considered:
 - Peatland stability; and
 - Carbon emissions balance.

CPO 10.146: Ensure that proposals for energy development demonstrate that human health has been considered, including those relating to the topics of:

- Noise (including consistency with the World Health Organisation's 2018 Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region).
- Shadow Flicker (for wind turbine developments, including detailed Shadow Flicker Study).
- Ground Conditions/Geology (including landslide and slope stability risk assessment).
- Air Quality; and Water Quality.
- Assessment of impacts on collision risk species (bird and bats).

CPO 10.147: With regard to wind energy developments, to ensure that the potential for visual disturbance should be mitigated by applying an appropriate setback distance, which, where relevant, complies with available Ministerial Guidelines.

The Proposed Development will support the delivery of objectives set out in the WCDP. With respect to Wind Energy Policies and objectives, it is stated that Westmeath County Council must “have regard to the principles and planning guidance set out in Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government publications relating to ‘Wind Energy Development’”(CPO 10.142), “Ensure the security of energy supply by supporting the potential of the wind energy resources of the County” (CPO 10.143 (CPO 10.133 prior to ministerial direction), and “To strictly direct large-scale energy production projects, in the form of wind farms, onto cutover cutaway peatlands in the County, subject to environmental” considerations (CPO 10.145).

The Proposed Development will support the overall objectives of the CDP in providing wind energy development in accordance with national policy and guidelines. It will contribute to ensuring energy supply in the County with the potential to provide an estimated 52.8 and 57.6MW of power (for assessment purposes).

The Proposed Development complies with CPO 10.146, and CPO 10.147. In relation to CPO 10.145, it is noted that by way of the An Bord Pleanála precedent (Reg. Ref: ABP - 311565-21) that policy CPO 10.145 (policy 10.135 in the Draft WCDP) severely curtails the potential of the County to meet national renewable energy targets. To “strictly direct large-scale” wind farm developments onto cutover cutaway peatlands, severely curtails the potential of the county to meet national renewable energy targets and does not align within National planning policy and objectives set out in the Climate Action Plan 2023 and the Climate Action Plan 2024 (Consultation Draft). The same argument will apply in relation to the wind farm strategy for County Westmeath which indicates that the entire County is considered to be at either low capacity or no capacity.

In evaluating this application (ABP -311565-21), the inspector also stated that:

8.3.14 As in the case of Policy Objective 143¹⁰, the requirement to limit wind farm development within the county to areas of cutover/cutaway peatlands severely curtails the potential of the county to meet national renewable energy targets. It is clear and unambiguous from the Draft Ministerial Direction, that it is both envisaged and required that County Westmeath contribute to delivering its share of overall government targets in respect of renewable energy and climate change.’

The Inspector then went onto state that even if the Board came to the conclusion that the proposal is a material contravention of the plan, it can grant planning permission in light of the provisions of S.37(2)(b) of the Act. This is because section 37(2)(b) allows the Board when determining appeals to grant planning permission, notwithstanding a material contravention of a development plan. The Inspector applied those tests as follows: “Section 37(2)(b)(ii) – in that there are conflicting objectives in the development plan insofar as the proposed development is concerned. In this regard I refer the Board to the previous section of my assessment which indicates that there are many policy statements and objectives contained in the development plan that generally support the provision of wind energy.

Section 37(2)(b)(iii) – in that the proposed development should be granted having regard to Regional Planning Guidelines for the area and other National Policy Guidelines (referred to in Section 7 above) including the Climate Action Plan and the National Planning Framework.

On the basis of the above, I consider that the Board, notwithstanding the provisions of CPO10.146 can consider granting planning permission primarily on the basis of the overarching national policy objectives in relation to the promotion of renewable energy

¹⁰ which was deleted as a result of the Ministerial Direction.

targets within the State....Policy CPO10.146 should be assessed in the context of national policy priorities in respect of the current global energy crises and the need to tackle the issue of climate change by supporting diversification and security of energy supplies in the transition to renewable energy production and consumption. I therefore do not consider that the proposed development is contrary to wind farm policy as suggested in some of the submissions.” (see paragraphs 8.3.14, 8.3.15 and 8.3.18)).

It is respectfully submitted that the Board is required to consider the following, amongst other things, when determining this SID application:

“s37G (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the Board shall consider—
c) the provisions of the development plan or plans for the area...(g) the matters referred to in section 143, [That being –

(a) the policies and objectives for the time being of the Government, a State authority, the Minister, planning authorities and any other body which is a public authority whose functions have, or may have, a bearing on the proper planning and sustainable development of cities, towns, or other areas, whether urban or rural,

(b) the national interest and any effect the performance of the Board’s functions may have on issues of strategic economic or social importance to the State, and

(c) the National Planning Framework and any regional spatial and economic strategy for the time being in force.”

Accordingly, we note the Board may consider the Proposed Development contravenes CPO 10.146. However, the Board still has jurisdiction to grant planning permission in those circumstances under s37G (6):

“The Board may decide to grant a permission for development, or any part of a development, under this section even if the proposed development, or part thereof, contravenes materially the development plan relating to any area in which it is proposed to situate the development”.

In this regard the Board is required to consider the matters under section 143 (which overlap somewhat with the matters in section 37(2)(b)) and we respectfully submit means the Board should grant planning permission because the Proposed Development is strongly supported by European, national, regional and other local policy on promoting renewable energy development (section 143((a))), it is of national interest and strategic social performance (section 143(b)) and is in accordance with the NPF and regional policy (section 143(c)). National policy considerations have also weighed heavily in favour of granting planning permission for other wind farms (see section 5.2). Accordingly, we respectfully submit that the Board should grant planning permission.

Please also refer to relevant Planning precedents set out in Section 5.2 of this report.

The Applicant is aware that the Board recently refused a planning application ref: ABP-316051-23 with one of the reasons for refusal being that the proposed development “would be contrary to Policy Objective CPO 10.145...[and] the Board was not satisfied that, notwithstanding the benefits of renewable energy proposals and the policy support otherwise, that the proposed development would in this instance be plan led as it would not be in accordance with the stated policy objective of the statutory development for the

statutory development plan for the subject site. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”.

This reason followed the approach of the Inspector who identified a material contravention of CPO 10.145 and referred to the cases of Brophy v. An Bord Pleanála [2015 IEHC 433 and Murtagh v An Bord Pleanála (unreported High Court March 29th 2023) “which notes that the primacy of the development plan extends to cases where there is a conflict between its provisions and a policy of the NPF...” (paragraph 11.4.5 of the report)...”Having regard to recent case law, I consider that the proposed development should be refused on this basis.” (Paragraph 11.4.6).

We respectfully submit that the primacy of the local development plan, or the need to be local development “plan led”, does not apply to this SID application because of 37G (6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (see above) and indeed significant weight should be placed on the criteria under section 143 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (see above). The SID process was developed to ensure developments in the national interest or otherwise benefitting from wider policy support importance can be granted permission, even if they contravene overly restrictive local policy. As such, we respectfully submit that planning permission should be granted for this application.

We also submit that the Board is required to comply with S.15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 as amended which requires inter alia, An Bord Pleanála to perform its functions in a manner consistent with “(a) the most recent approved climate action plan, (b) the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy, (c) the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaption plans (d) the furtherance of the national climate objective and (e) the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State.”

An EIAR and Appropriate Assessment has been completed and accompanies this application under separate cover. The Proposed Development has been fully assessed, including the environmental constraints of the Proposed Development Site. The findings confirm that with mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

4.5.1.2 Renewable Energy Policy Objectives

Section 10.22 of the WCDP identifies the demand for energy increases over the lifetime of the Plan and how renewable energy sources which are “*continuously replenished by nature and is therefore, a more sustainable alternative to our dependency on fossil fuels*”.

“In transitioning to a low carbon economy, future diversification and adaptation to new energy technologies is vital. Renewable energy such as wind, solar and biomass will assist in managing the transition of the local economies of such areas in gaining the economic benefits of greener energy.”

With respect to Energy, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.139: Support local, regional, national, and international initiatives for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy sources which make use of the natural resources in an environmentally acceptable manner and having particular regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

CPO 10.140: Facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and support the implementation of actions identified in the Westmeath County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 and any future amendments.

CPO 10.141: Promote and support the use of renewable forms of energy as a contribution to the energy demand of all new buildings where it is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of an area.

With respect to Renewable Energy specifically, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 10.155: Support and advance the provision of renewable energy resources and programmes in line with the Government's National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), the Governments' Energy White Paper "Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future (2015-2030) and any other relevant policy adopted during the lifetime of this plan.

CPO 10.156: Work in partnership with local communities to develop energy efficient and renewable energy projects to benefit the local area subject to development management standards.

CPO 10.157: Support the production of sustainable energy from renewable sources such as wind, solar, bioenergy and the development of waste to energy/Combined Heat and Power Schemes at suitable locations and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive.

CPO 10.160: Prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy for the County over the lifetime of this plan and subject to the availability of resources. This strategy will support the development of renewable energy infrastructure to deliver government objectives in relation to energy efficiency and the transition to a low carbon future.

CPO 10.161: Support future projects and funding initiatives to support renewable energy usage in Westmeath.

Section 10.22 of the WCDP identifies the demand for energy increases over the lifetime of the Plan and how renewable energy sources which are "***continuously replenished by nature and is therefore, a more sustainable alternative to our dependency on fossil fuels***".

The Proposed Development of 8no turbines will provide a sustainable renewable energy source, which will make use of the natural resources of Westmeath while ensuring no negative impacts on the environment occur as a result of the Proposed Development. This is in accordance with CPO 10.139 which seeks to limit "*emissions of greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy sources which make use of the natural resources in an environmentally acceptable manner*", **CPO 10.140** which seeks "*to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases*" and **CPO 10.157** "*Support the production of sustainable energy from renewable sources such as wind,*"

As outlined in Section 4.7.5 of this report, extensive community engagement has taken place throughout the scoping and design stages of the Proposed Development, in accordance with **CPO 10.156:** *Work in partnership with local communities*).

4.5.1.3 Climate Action Policy Objectives

Chapter 10 of the WCDP looks at Climate Action, where the aim is to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient County. Westmeath County Council adopted the ‘*The Climate Change Adaption Strategy*’, in September 2019 in response to threats posed by climate change. Section 11.9 of this plan states the following:

“The Plan recognises the contribution that wind and solar energy make to meeting national renewable energy targets. In this regard, the plan strongly supports the development of renewable energy resources. In this regard, since the adoption of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020, the Council has granted permission for a number of solar farms within the County. The total number of photovoltaic panels permitted to date, on a total site area of approximate 330 hectares, which when operational will generate renewable energy output of approximately 130 MW. It is further noted that consent has been granted for a windfarm of 13 turbines at Coole with potential to generate 50MW of renewable energy.

It is acknowledged in the plan that the Council is open to new and innovative renewable energy sources and technological solutions to addressing climate change. In this regard, the Council will seek to collaborate with the Bord Na Mona Transition team and adjacent Local Authorities to progress the transition from brown to green energy.”

In incorporating the Climate Change Adaption Strategy into the CDP, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 11.1: Support the implementation and achievement of European, National, Regional and Local objectives for climate adaptation and mitigation as detailed in the following documents, taking into account other provisions of the Plan (including those relating to land use planning, energy, sustainable mobility, flood risk management and drainage) and having regard to the Climate mitigation and adaptation measures which have been outlined through the policy objectives in this Development Plan:

- National Mitigation Plan (2017 and any subsequent versions).
- National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions).
- Climate Action Plan (2019 and any subsequent versions).
- Any Regional Decarbonisation Plan prepared on foot of commitments included in the emerging Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.
- Relevant provisions of any Sectoral Adaptation Plans prepared to comply the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, including those seeking to contribute towards the National Transition Objective, to pursue, and achieve, the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of the year 2050; and
- Westmeath County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024. CPO 11.2.

CPO 11.6: Support collaboration between local authorities, the Bord na Móna Transition Team and relevant stakeholders and the development of partnership approaches to integrated peatland management for a just transition that incorporate any relevant policies and strategies such as the Bord na Móna Biodiversity Plan 2016-2021 and the national

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plans. This shall include support for the rehabilitation and/or re-wetting of suitable peatland habitats.

CPO 11.9: Review the outcomes of the Development Plan Guidelines, as adopted, and to consider reasonable steps considered necessary, in consultation with the Council, to align with the approach to climate action recommended in the guidelines over the lifetime of the Plan.

CPO 11.1, CPO 11.6, and CPO 11.9 seek to support the “implementation and achievement of European, National, Regional and Local objectives for climate adaptation and mitigation”. In line with these Climate Action Policy Objectives, the proposed renewable energy development will assist Westmeath County Council in achieving these objectives through the provision of a renewable energy development which will assist in providing energy security in a sustainable manner on peatlands in line with the National Transition Objective.

4.5.1.4 Natural Heritage Policy Objectives

Chapter 12 of the WCDP looks at Natural Heritage and Green Infrastructure, the aim is “to protect and enhance the County’s natural heritage and biodiversity and ensure that networks of green infrastructure are identified, created, protected and enhanced to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to communities”.

With respect to Natural Heritage, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.1: Contribute as appropriate towards the protection of designated sites in compliance with relevant EU Directives and applicable national legislation.

CPO 12.2: Support the implementation of any relevant recommendations contained in the National Biodiversity Plan, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, and the National Peatlands Strategy.

Section 12.17 of the WCDP, looks at Peatlands, and states that Peatlands make up the majority of the Natural Heritage Areas in the County. The WCDP acknowledges that Peatlands are one of the oldest surviving ecosystems and a major natural, archaeological, and non-renewable resource. *“In their natural state peatlands act as long-term sinks for atmospheric carbon dioxide. Peatlands are the most important long-term carbon store in the terrestrial biosphere. They sequester and store atmospheric carbon for thousands of years. Given the extent of intact and relatively intact raised bogs in Westmeath, considerable potential exists to use this valuable resource to mitigate against the impacts of climate change.”*

With respect to the Proposed Development, an AA Screening Report and NIS was prepared to provide the information for the competent authority, in this case An Bord Pleanála, to carry out a screening assessment and, if applicable, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the Proposed Development in accordance with and fulfilment of the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Further details and an assessment of the likely impact of the Proposed Development thereon is provided in the EIAR and Appropriate Assessment which accompany this planning application.

With the identified mitigation measures in place, it can be concluded, beyond all reasonable scientific doubt that the Proposed Development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects will not undermine the conservation objectives of any European Sites. It can therefore be concluded that the Proposed Development will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

A proposed mitigation scheme for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases is described, and these mitigation measures will be implemented in full. A proposed schedule of mitigation is set out in Chapter 17 of the EIAR. These measures are incorporated into the CEMP (Appendix 2.2 of the EIAR). A Habitat and Species Management Plan has also been prepared and is included as Appendix 5.10 of the EIAR.

4.5.1.5 European Site Policy Objectives

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.4: Protect and conserve Special Areas of Conservation, candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and candidate Special Protection Areas, designated under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives respectively.

CPO 12.5: Ensure that no plans, programmes, etc. or projects giving rise to significant cumulative, direct, indirect or secondary impacts on European Sites arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 386 decommissioning or from any other effects shall be permitted on the basis of this Plan (either individually or in combination with other plans, programmes, etc. or projects). Footnote: Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

CPO 12.6: Ensure that any plan or project that could have a significant adverse impact (either by themselves or in combination with other plans and projects) upon the conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 Site or would result in the deterioration of any habitat or any species reliant on that habitat will not be permitted. Footnote: Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

CPO 12.7: Assess any plan or project in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive to determine whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the site either individually or cumulatively upon the integrity, conservation objectives and qualifying interest of any Natura 2000 Site.

CPO 12.8: Require an ecological appraisal for development not directly connected with or necessary to the management of Natura Sites, or a proposed Natura Site and which are likely to have significant effects on that site either individually or cumulatively.

CPO 12.9: Identify and provide appropriate buffer zones between Designated Sites and local biodiversity features and areas zoned for development.

CPO 12.10: Prepare Strategic Habitat Management Plans for Natura 2000 Sites in Council ownership in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and relevant stakeholders.

CPO 12.11: Promote the maintenance and as appropriate, achievement of favourable conservation status of habitats and species and to improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, by maintaining and where appropriate, developing features in the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora.

CPO 12.12: Require that new development proposals affecting designated sites have regard to the sensitivities identified in the SEA Environmental Report prepared in respect of this plan.

With respect to designated European sites within the vicinity of Proposed Development site, an AA Screening Report and NIS was prepared to provide the information for the competent authority, in this case An Bord Pleanála, to carry out a screening assessment and, if applicable, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the Proposed Development in accordance with and fulfilment of the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Further details and an assessment of the likely impact of the Proposed Development thereon is provided in the EIAR an AA Screening Report and NIS which accompany this planning application.

The AA Screening Report concludes that it cannot be excluded on the basis of objective evidence and in view of best scientific knowledge, that there will not be any likely significant effects from the construction, operation, or decommissioning activities from the Proposed Development alone, and in combination with other plans or projects, on:

- River Boyne and River Blackwater cSAC,
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA, and
- Lough Derravarragh SPA.

The AA Screening Report also concludes that it can be excluded on the basis of objective evidence and in view of best scientific knowledge, that there will not be any likely significant effects from the Proposed Development alone, and in combination with other plans or projects, on any other European site including (without limitation) Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC, Lough Bane and Lough Glass cSAC, Lough Lene SAC, White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC, Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC, Mount Hevey Bog SAC, Wooddown Bog SAC 002205 and Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA.

With the identified mitigation measures in place, it can be concluded, beyond all reasonable scientific doubt that the Proposed Development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects will not undermine the conservation objectives of any European Sites. It can therefore be concluded that the Proposed Development will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

A proposed mitigation scheme for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases is described within the AA Screening Report and NIS, and these mitigation measures will be implemented in full, ensuring the Proposed Development will not have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of any European sites.

4.5.1.6 Rare & Protected Sites Policy Objectives

The WCDP outlines that the rare and protected species must be protected in line with European Legislation and applications must demonstrate that proposals will not have significant adverse impact on rare and threatened species. With respect to Rare and Protected Sites, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.13: Protect, manage, and enhance the natural heritage, biodiversity, landscape, and environment of County Westmeath, in recognition of its importance as both a non-renewable resource and a natural asset.

CPO 12.14: Require all new developments in the early pre-planning stage of the planning process to identify, protect and enhance ecological features by making provision for local biodiversity (e.g., through provision of swift boxes, bat roost sites, green roofs, etc.) and provide links to the wider Green Infrastructure network as an essential part of the design process.

CPO 12.15: Support the protection of all native woodlands listed in the National Survey of Native Woodlands 2003 to 2008.

CPO 12.16: Apply the precautionary principle in relation to development proposals in areas identified as being of national nature conservation interest, by requiring a Scientific/Ecological Risk Assessment to ensure that the development will not impact on the integrity and habitat value of the site.

CPO 12.17: Support and cooperate with Statutory Authorities and other relevant bodies in support of measures taken to manage designated nature conservation sites, in order to achieve their conservation objectives. Specific regard shall be had to Conservation Management Plans and their conservation objectives/ management practices, where they exist.

CPO 12.18: Consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in regard to any developments (those requiring permission and those not requiring planning permission) which the Council proposes to carry out within pNHAs, NHAs, SACs, SPAs, and other important ecological sites.

CPO 12.19: Maintain the conservation value of Council owned land within NHAs and pNHAs and promote the conservation value of Council owned lands adjoining NHAs.

CPO 12.20: Protect and conserve NHAs and pNHAs including NHAs that become designated and notified to the Local Authority during the lifetime of the Plan and seek to develop linkages between designated sites, where feasible and as resources permit.

CPO 12.21: Lighting fixtures should provide only the amount of light necessary for personal safety and should be designed so as to avoid creating glare or emitting light above a horizontal plane. Lighting fixtures should have minimum environmental impact and Dark Sky lighting should be considered in the interest of reducing the impact of lighting on wildlife as part of any future planning application, thereby contributing towards the protection of amenity and the protection of light sensitive species such as bats. EUROBATS guidelines should be applied in informing proposed development(s), where relevant.

CPO 12.22: Require, in special circumstances where protected species/habitats are identified in association with a development proposal, that an 'Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)' prepared by a suitably qualified and indemnified person be undertaken for a proposed development which may potentially have a significant impact on rare and threatened species.

With respect to the Rare Sites and Policy Objectives set out in the WCDP, the Proposed Development has gone through extensive scoping and pre-planning exercises to inform the final design of the Proposed Development. This is to ensure that the relevant parties including WCC and the NPWS have been consulted to ensure the protection of these sites. As outlined above, further details and an assessment of the likely impact of the Proposed Development thereon is provided in the EIAR, AA Screening Report and NIS which accompany this planning application.

With the identified mitigation measures in place, it can be concluded, beyond all reasonable scientific doubt that the Proposed Development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects will not undermine the conservation objectives of any European Sites. It can therefore be concluded that the Proposed Development will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

A proposed mitigation scheme for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases is described within the AA Screening Report and NIS, and these mitigation measures will be implemented in full, ensuring the Proposed Development will not have any adverse effect on the integrity of any European sites and complies with the Rare Sites Policy Objectives as set out in the WCDP.

4.5.1.7 Sites of Biodiversity Value and Non-designated Sites Policy Objectives

The WCDP acknowledges that Westmeath has many important wildlife habitats that don't meet the criteria for designations as an NHA but contribute to the wider ecological network. With respect to these sites, it is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.23: Seek to create and enhance ecological linkages and buffer zones from development.

CPO 12.24: Protect and where possible enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity, including woodlands, trees, hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands, rivers, streams, natural springs, wetlands, geological and geo-morphological systems, other landscape features, natural lighting conditions, and associated wildlife where these form part of the ecological network and/or may be considered as ecological corridors or steppingstones in the context of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. Appropriate mitigation and/or compensation to conserve biodiversity, landscape character and green infrastructure networks will be required where habitats are at risk or lost as part of a development.

CPO 12.25: Recognise that nature conservation is not just confined to designated sites and acknowledge the need to protect non-designated habitats and landscapes and to conserve the biological diversity.

CPO 12.26: Investigate a protocol in relation to the application of an ecosystem services scoring approach to inform the assessment of planning applications.

With respect to the Sites of Biodiversity Value and Non -designated Sites Policy Objectives, the Proposed Development has gone through extensive scoping and pre-planning exercises to inform the final design of the Proposed Development. As outlined above, further details and an assessment of the likely impact of the Proposed Development thereon is provided in the EIAR, AA Screening Report and NIS which accompany this planning application.

A proposed schedule of mitigation is set out in Chapter 17 of the EIAR. These measures are incorporated into the CEMP (Appendix 2.2 of the EIAR) and will be implemented in compliance with Rare Sites Policy Objectives as set out in the CDP. A Habitat and Species Management Plan has also been prepared and is included as Appendix 5.10 of the EIAR.

4.5.1.8 Trees, Woodland, and Hedgerows Policy Objectives

Section 12.14 of the WCDP outlines the importance of trees, woodlands, and hedgerows as an asset in County Westmeath for biodiversity, habitats, and wildlife corridors.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.37: Preserve and enhance the amenity and biodiversity value of the County, by promoting the protection of trees, groups of trees and ancient woodlands, of significant amenity value, especially native and broadleaf species.

CPO 12.39: Discourage the felling of mature trees and hedgerow, particularly species rich roadside and townland boundary hedgerows to facilitate development and seek Tree Management Plans to ensure that trees are adequately protected during development and incorporated into the design of new developments.

CPO 12.40: Protect and preserve existing hedgerows in new developments, particularly species rich roadside and townland boundary hedgerows, and where their removal is necessary during the course of road works or other works seek their replacement with new hedgerows of native species indigenous to the area.

CPO 12.41: Support increases in tree cover (of suitable species) and native species hedgerows in all towns and villages across Westmeath due to air quality, shade, aesthetic, and health benefits they provide.

CPO 12.43: Encourage the protection of the trees which are considered an important component of demesne landscapes.

Chapter 10 of the EIAR accompanying this application looks at the receiving environment in the context of the Proposed Development. Mitigation Measures are included to ensure compliance with CDP policy. A Habitat and Species Management Plan has also been prepared and is included as Appendix 5.10 of the EIAR. This provides for compliance with policy objectives relating to Trees, Woodland, and Hedgerows.

4.5.1.9 Waterways Policy Objectives

The WCDP recognises that Westmeath has a number of significant inland waterways which function as ecological corridors throughout the County. It is acknowledged within the Plan that many of the waterways contribute to the character and amenity of the County and have been afforded protection as Natural Heritage Areas, Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.54: Seek the continued improvement of water quality, bathing facilities and other recreational opportunities in waterways and to protect the ecology and wildlife thereof.

CPO 12.56: Protect the biodiversity of rivers, streams and other water courses and maintain them in an open state and discourage culverting and realignment.

CPO 12.57: Consult with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Government, Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, and local communities on development proposals that may affect inland waterways, rivers, lakes, canals, or water courses.

CPO 12.58: Ensure that the County's watercourses are retained for their biodiversity and flood protection values and to conserve and enhance where possible, the wildlife habitats of the County's rivers and riparian zones, lakes, canals, and streams which occur outside of designated areas to provide a network of habitats and biodiversity corridors throughout the county.

CPO 12.59: Consult, as appropriate, with Inland Fisheries Ireland in relation to any development that could potentially impact on the aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats.

CPO 12.60: Ensure that run off from a proposed development does not result in a deterioration of downstream watercourses or habitat.

CPO 12.61; Seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers in order to avoid significant effects including loss of habitat and disturbance, including ensuring that any new projects, such as greenways, are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities, such as riparian zones.

CPO 12.62: Have regard to the Inland Fisheries guidelines "Planning for watercourses in the Urban Environment" in relation to nature-based surface water management.

CPO 12.63: Protect waterbodies and watercourses from inappropriate development, including rivers, streams, associated undeveloped riparian strips, wetlands, and natural floodplains. This will include the preservation habitat features/structure, such as tree line density, and protection buffers in riverine and wetland areas, as appropriate.

With respect to the Waterways Policy Objectives, the Proposed Development will protect all watercourses within the vicinity of, or hydrologically connected to the Proposed Development Site, including the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC, the River Stonyford and its tributary D'arcy Crossroad Streams. A buffer distance between watercourses and any proposed development including construction activities including fuel storage or infrastructure was applied to those watercourses within the Site, including fuel storage and construction compounds. No works will occur within this buffer with the exception of the development of turbine T1. Where the 50 m buffer cannot be provided at this location, a drainage report has been undertaken and mitigation measures provided for (see Technical Appendix 7-4). Please also refer to the Habitat and Species Management Plan has also been prepared as Appendix 5.10. This Plan identifies objectives to restoration of riparian zone and Enhancement of transition mire and quaking bog habitats.

4.5.1.10 Peatlands Policy Objectives

Section 12.17 of the WCDP identifies peatlands as a characteristic of the landscape in County Westmeath covering about 17,000ha of the County.

"Peatlands are one of our oldest surviving ecosystems. They preserve a record of the historic environment and are considered amongst the most important ecosystems of the world, because of their key value for

biodiversity, regulation of climate as a valuable natural carbon sink, water filtration and supply.”

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 12.64: Protect the county’s designated peatland areas and landscapes, including any ancient walkways through bogs and to conserve their ecological, archaeological, cultural, and educational heritage.

CPO 12.65: Require the preparation of Hydrological Reports for significant developments within and in close proximity to peatlands, and to take account of same in the assessment of impacts on the integrity of peatland ecosystems.

CPO 12.73: Undertake a feasibility study to identify peat ways, where appropriate and examine the tourist potential of same.

CPO 12.74: Support the implementation of the ‘National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022’ within the County.

With respect to the Peatlands Policy Objectives, Chapter 6 of the EIAR accompanying this application assesses land, soils and geology of the Proposed Development Site and surrounds and Chapter 10 looks at Landscape. Chapter 7 of EIAR assesses the impact of the Proposed Development on Hydrology and the water environment. These Chapters of the EIAR assess the Proposed Development against the CDP to ensure compliance.

4.5.1.11 Landscape Policy Objectives

Chapter 13 of the WCDP outlines policies and objectives for ‘*Landscape and Lake Management*’, where part of the aim is to ‘*enhance the overall characteristics, qualities and diversity of landscape character*’.

A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the County was undertaken in the making of the Plan. This assessment provides “*an understanding of the value and sensitivity of the County’s landscapes and its future management needs*”.

Figure 13.1 of the CDP outlines the Landscape Character Assessment Map for the County. The Proposed Development falls within the ‘River Deel & Lowlands’, Landscape Character Area.

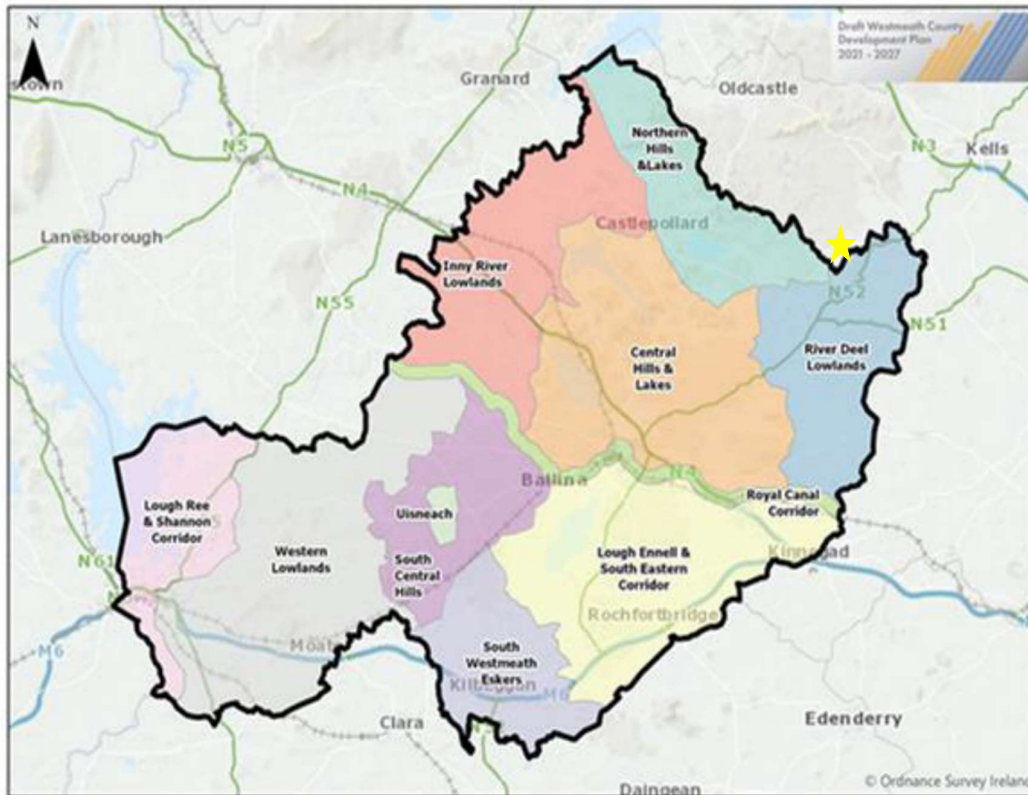


Figure 13-1 Landscape Character Assessment Map (site denoted by yellow star)

River Deel & Lowlands

“The River Deel, the Stonyford River and their hinterlands form this landscape character area typified by low-lying pasture punctuated with small lakes which are flanked by scrub and wet woodland. These rivers form part of the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC complex. The area east of Delvin and running south along the Meath Border is characterised by cutover, cutaway bogs and small tracts of intact bog. Settlements within this area include Clonmellon, Delvin, Killucan-Rathwire and Raharney which are located within the eastern commuter belt to Dublin. This part of the county has a strong historic landscape component with several demesne landscapes occurring within the area. Two main road corridors the N51 and N52 traverse the area. A number of quarries are also operational in the area.”

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.1: Support the implementation of the National Landscape Strategy.

CPO 13.2: Protect the distinctiveness, value, and sensitivity of County Westmeath’s landscapes and lakelands by recognising their capacity to sustainably integrate development.

CPO 13.3: Support and implement objectives contained in any Regional Landscape Character Assessment.

CPO 13.4: Conserve and enhance the high nature conservation value of the Landscape Character Areas in order to create/protect ecologically resilient and varied landscapes.

CPO 13.5: Identify and integrate new green and blue infrastructure networks within the existing landscape character areas in the interests of biodiversity and climate change and in recognition of the tourism potential of these assets.

CPO 13.6: Require that development is sensitively designed, so as to minimise its visual impact on the landscape, nature conservation, archaeology, and groundwater quality.

With respect to the Landscape Policy Objectives, Chapter 10 Landscape of the accompanying EIAR, assesses the Proposed Development against the CDP to ensure compliance. Based on the landscape, visual and cumulative assessment contained in the EIAR, it is considered that there will not be any significant effects arising from the Proposed Development.

4.5.1.12 Cultural Policy Objectives

Chapter 14 of the WCDP looks at cultural heritage, where the Council aims to, *“recognises the importance of identifying, valuing, and safeguarding our archaeological, architectural, and cultural heritage for future generations and aims to do so by means of proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource.*

“Tangible aspects of this cultural heritage include archaeological sites and monuments, vernacular structures, and historic buildings – the landscape indicators of our past. Intangible aspects of our cultural heritage include mythology associated with the County such as the story of the Children of Lir, An Táin Bó Cúailgne (the Cattle Raid of Cooley), links to historic figures and events, as well as language, folklore, and place names.”

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 14.1: Improve accessibility to our cultural heritage and maximise its potential as a learning resource.

CPO 14.2: Promote the understanding of cultural heritage in terms of its inherent and unique character and to recognise what elements should be preserved, conserved, or enhanced.

CPO 14.3: Support the implementation of objectives and actions of the Westmeath County Heritage Plan 2018-2023 and update during the lifetime of the Plan.

CPO 14.4: Support the growth of cultural tourism in the County, including the potential for niche heritage-based tourism products by facilitating the development of heritage events, festivals, and infrastructure in a sustainable manner.

With respect to the Cultural Heritage Policy Objectives, Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage of the accompanying EIAR, assesses the Proposed Development against the CDP to ensure compliance with Cultural Heritage Policy objectives. This assessment found that in summary, the Proposed Development would cause no significant indirect effects to heritage assets within or outside the Proposed Development Site. A slight significance of effect was identified to Ballinlough Castle (**15400906**), within Ballinlough Estate and Rosmead Country House (**15400921**) and the Triumphant Arch (**15400904**) and the Rosmead estate curtilage buildings. There were no predicted indirect effects upon the series of Ringforts (**ME022-029, ME023-010, ME023-009, WM009-017, WM009-014, WM009-016, WM009-018, WM009-033, WM009-040**) across the landscape. In all cases, the significance of effect upon all of these assets were neutral.

The assessment found no potential for direct harm to any known archaeological remains within the Main Wind Farm Site, although this does not rule out any unknown archaeological remains. However, it found that the development within the Proposed Substation Site west of Clonmellon, (within the jurisdiction of Meath County Council), could potentially cause direct harm to potential archaeological remains of low significance related to the Early Medieval Ringfort (**ME023-010**) or other archaeological remains, identified as anomalies by the geophysical survey. These anomalies represent a linear feature and two pit-like features, which the track and grid-connection within the substation has potential to truncate. The magnitude of effect will be very low adverse, meaning the significance of effect upon potential archaeology will be slight. Archaeological mitigation will be implemented in full, and the information gained and contributed to the archaeological record through archaeological works suggested (strip, map, and sample) will offset the loss of the archaeological remains. Mitigation for this has been laid out in Chapter 12 of the EIAR. Overall, whilst the significance of effect upon the potential archaeological remains will be slight with the implementation of mitigation, the recovery and recording of archaeological remains prior to removal will contribute to the archaeological record.

Based on the assessments carried out and mitigation measures outlined the Proposed Development is in compliance with cultural heritage CPO and supports the CDP in recognizing, the importance of *“identifying, valuing, and safeguarding our archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage for future generations and aims to do so by means of proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource”*.

4.5.1.13 Development Management Standards

Chapter 16 of the WCDP outlines development management standards for the assessment of planning applications in ensuring compliance with the Development Plan. With respect to Wind Energy, Section 16.13.1 refers readers to Chapter 10, Section 10.23 of the Development Plan and the Landscape Character Assessment map of the County which is contained within Volume 2 of the Plan (Figure 3.1 above). The policies and objectives outlined within Chapter 10 of the CDP are provided in Section 3.6.1.2 of this Report and the policies and objectives with respect to Landscape Character Assessment are included in Section 3.6.1.11 of this Report.

4.5.1.14 Appendix 5 -List of Amenity Routes & Protected Views

Appendix 5 of the Westmeath County Development Plan provides a number of maps and a list of Scenic Routes and Protected Views within the County. As set out in Chapter 10 of the EIAR, there are no Scenic Routes or Protected Views within the vicinity of the Proposed Development.

4.5.1.15 Volume 8 -Record of Protected Structures

Volume 8 of the Westmeath County Development Plan provides the Record of Protected Structures within the County under Section 51 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended). There are two structures within the vicinity of the Proposed Development as follows:

009-034 Gateway, Rosmead House, Robinstown Little. This can be described as a *“Triumphant arched gateway serving Rosmead House (15400921), erected c.1795. An important, elegantly composed triumphant arch gateway serving Rosmead House (15400921). These spectacular entrance gates are very well-built using high quality ashlar limestone and are extensively embellished using ashlar and Coade Stone detailing. NIAH No. 15400904, this is of Regional Importance.*

009-048 Rosmead House Cavestown and Rosmead. This can be described as a *“Detached seven-bay three-storey country house, built c.1780, having advanced three-bay breakfront to the centre of the front facade (southeast). Now in a ruinous and overgrown condition. The impressive ruins of a very large and imposing Georgian country house, now forming a picturesque shell, of some romantic quality, in the landscape to the north of Delvin”.* NIAH No. 15400921, this is of Regional Importance.

As outlined above, in Section 4.6.1.16, Cultural Heritage Policy Objectives, the Proposed Development would cause no significant indirect effects to heritage assets within or outside the Proposed Development Site. The Proposed Development is committed to ensuring no negative impacts will occur as a result of the Proposed Development, please refer to Chapter 12 of the accompanying EIAR, Cultural Heritage for further details.

The Proposed Development does not fall within an area that is environmentally sensitive as set out in the Westmeath County Development Plan, it has been carefully sited to minimise visual and environmental impacts and it strengthens the renewable energy and energy objectives of reducing reliance on fossil fuels and transitioning towards more sustainable forms of energy. It is therefore considered that the sensitive siting, design, and elements of the Proposed Development are appropriate for the area and fully in compliance with the CDP.

4.5.2 Ministerial Direction on the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Synopsis of the Ministerial Direction

On 28th of September 2022, Mr. Peter Burke, Minister for Local Government and Planning issued a Ministerial Direction pursuant to Section 31 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) directing Westmeath County Council to take a number of steps in relation to the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027.

The relevant text is as follows:

“(1) This Direction may be cited as the Planning and Development (Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027) Direction 2022. (2) The Planning Authority is hereby directed to take the following steps:

- (i) Delete wind energy policy objective CPO 10.143¹¹ in its entirety from Section 10.23.2 of the Development Plan as per the Chief Executive's recommendation.*
- I. Pursuant to Section 31(1)(a)(i)(II) and Section 31(1)(b) The Minister is of the opinion that the Development Plan has failed to implement a recommendation made to the planning authority by the Office and that the Development Plan as made fails to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*
 - II. Pursuant to Section 31(1)(a)(i) The Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 is inconsistent with the policy objectives of the National Planning Framework, specifically NPO 55, which states that it is an objective to 'promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations.....to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050', and the requirements for the planning authority to comply with, and the development plan to be consistent with, the aforementioned National Policy Objective under Sections 10(1A) and/or 12(11) read in conjunction with Section 12(18);*
 - III. Pursuant to Section 31(1)(c) The Development Plan does not have adequate regard to Ministerial Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Act, specifically the requirement under the Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2006) that the development plan must achieve a reasonable balance in responding to overall Government Policy on renewable energy, enabling the wind energy resources of the planning authority's area to be harnessed in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development in order to provide a plan-led context to the assessment of individual wind energy development proposals.*
 - IV. Pursuant to Section 31(1)(a)(i) & (ii) The Development Plan contains conflicting objectives on wind energy development such that the Policy objectives supporting wind and renewal energy development in chapters 10 and 11 of the adopted Development Plan cannot be achieved having regard to the separation distances required by wind energy policy objective CPO 10.143."*

On foot of the ministerial direction, the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 was amended in line with the ministerial direction and removed Policy CPO10.143 which related to mandatory setback distances for wind turbines from the Development Plan, as they were deemed to be contrary to national policy and Ministerial guidance on wind energy development.

4.5.3 Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCDP) sets out the policies and objectives and the overall strategy for the development of the County over the plan period 2021-2027.

¹¹ Refers to Policy on separation distances (CPO 10.132) which was renumbered CPO 10.143 in the adopted CDP & subsequently removed on Ministerial Direction.

The Strategic Vision of the Development Plan is as follows: *‘To improve the quality of life of all citizens in Meath by creating an environment that supports a vibrant growing economy and a well-connected place to live, learn and do business.’*

Section 6.15.3.2 of the MCDP outlines the fact that *“Wind Energy Wind Energy has been the most significant source of renewable electricity. In 2017, installed wind capacity had increased to 2,851 MW across the island of Ireland.”* And further states that; *“The Council will continue to support and encourage the principle of development of wind energy, in accordance with Government policy and having regard to the provisions of the Landscape Characterisation Assessment of the County and the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) or any revisions thereof.”*

4.5.3.1 Energy Efficiency Policy Objectives

With respect to Energy Efficiency, it is the policy of the Council to:

INF POL 35: To seek a reduction in greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy sources utilising the natural resources of the County in an environmentally acceptable manner consistent with best practice and planning principles.

INF POL 36: To support the implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy and to facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

INF POL 41: To encourage the development of wind energy, in accordance with Government policy and having regard to the Landscape Character Assessment of the County and the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) or any revisions thereof.

INF OBJ 39: To support Ireland’s renewable energy commitments outlined in national policy by facilitating the development and exploitation of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydro and bio-energy at suitable locations within the County where such development does not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment (including water quality), landscape, biodiversity or local amenities so as to provide for further residential and enterprise development within the county.

INF OBJ 46: To support the implementation of the actions of the Meath Climate Action Strategy 2019-2024 and review and update the Energy Management Action Plan 2011-2012, “Think Globally Act Locally”.

INF OBJ 47: To investigate the preparation of a Renewable Energy Strategy promoting technologies which are most viable in the County.

The Proposed Development will support the overall objectives of the MCDP in providing wind energy development in accordance with national policy and guidelines. It will contribute to ensuring energy supply in the County with the potential to provide an estimated 52.8 and 57.6MW of power (for assessment purposes).

An EIAR, Screening for Appropriate Assessment and NIS has been completed and accompanies this application under separate cover. The Proposed Development has been fully assessed, including the environmental constraints of the Proposed Development Site. The findings confirm that with mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

4.5.3.2 Wind Energy Services Policy Objectives

Section 11.8.3 of the MCDP outlines the requirements for any new wind farm proposals within the County. It further states that, *“topographical enclosures and extensive areas of degraded*

or previously developed lands should be identified for wind farm development to help minimize visual impacts and to harmonize wind turbines with the landscape”.

With respect to Wind Energy, it is the policy of the Council to:

DM POL 28: To require compliance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines, (2006) and Circular PL20-13, and any updates thereof. Any proposal shall be supported by both a technical and an environmental statement prepared to an acceptable standard which sets out how the proposal complies with the Guidelines.

An EIAR and Appropriate Assessment has been completed and accompanies this application under separate cover. The Proposed Development has been fully assessed, including the environmental constraints of the site. The findings confirm that with mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

Circular PL20-13 was issued by the Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government on the 20th of December 2013, setting out intention to review the Wind Energy Development Guidelines, Table 4-1 above outlines to what extent the Proposed Development complies with the Draft and adopted Wind Energy Development Guidelines.

4.5.3.3 North-South Interconnector Policy Objectives

“The north-south interconnector is an above ground electricity connection proposal linking the existing converter station at Woodland, Batterstown, Co. Meath and traversing through Meath, Cavan and Monaghan linking to a converter station at Turleenan in County Tyrone. Section 10.3 of the RSES outlines the following in relation to future north-south electricity interconnections “Increased connectivity with other grids is also needed and projects such as the north–south interconnector are of great importance for the region”.

With respect to the connector, it is the Council Policy to:

INF POL 46: To support and facilitate the development of enhanced electricity and gas supplies, and associated networks, to serve the existing and future needs of the County and to facilitate new transmission infrastructure projects that may be brought forward during the lifetime of the plan including the delivery and integration, **including linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner.**

INF POL 48 To ensure that energy transmission infrastructure follows best practice with regard to siting, design, and least environmental impact in the interest of landscape protection.

INF POL 50 To require that the location of local energy services such as electricity, be undergrounded, where appropriate.

INF OBJ 50 To seek the delivery of the necessary integration of transmission network requirements to facilitate linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner.

In compliance with the north-south connector policies, the Proposed Development will provide for the construction of 8 no wind turbines and associated works, which will provide for an estimated output of 52.8 to 57.6 MW (for assessment purposes). The Development will include the provision of the construction of 1 no. permanent 110 kV electrical substation west of Clonmellon, Co Meath and construction of 33kV underground electricity cabling along the N52 connecting the wind farm site to the proposed 110kV substation which will in turn be connected to the existing 110kV overhead line at Clonmellon. The Proposed Development fully aligns with the aforementioned policies in providing linkages of renewable energy proposals to the electricity transmission grid.

An EIAR and Appropriate Assessment has been completed and accompanies this application under separate cover. The Proposed Development has been fully assessed, including the environmental constraints of the site. The findings confirm that with mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

4.5.3.4 Climate Change Policy Objectives

CSOBJ 13: Support the implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy and the National Climate Change Adaption Framework Building Resilience to Climate Change 2012 through the County Development Plan and through the preparation of a Climate Change Adaptation Plan in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders.

Among the most important measures in Climate Action Policy is to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030. Notably Section 11 Electricity of CAP23 provides a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of providing 9 GW Onshore wind by 2030. The Proposed Development has the capacity to produce an estimated 52.8 to 57.6 MW (for assessment purposes) which will support the realisation of 9GW of onshore wind by 2030.

The Proposed Development has the potential to displace between 1,678,665 and 1,834,432 tonnes of CO₂ over the operational lifetime (35 years). Thus, this energy will be used to offset the same amount of energy that would otherwise be generated from energy sources with higher GHG emissions, supporting EU and National climate action policies.

4.5.3.5 Development Management Standards Policy Objectives

11.4.4 Trees and Hedgerows: Trees and Hedgerows are an important consideration with all developments, and it is considered that the retention of trees and hedgerows should be considered as part of any relevant planning application.

DM OBJ 11: Existing trees and hedgerows of biodiversity and/or amenity value shall be retained, where possible.

11.5.13 Boundary Treatments DM POL 9: To support the retention of field boundaries for their ecological/habitat significance, as demonstrated by a suitably qualified professional. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, mitigation by provision of the same boundary type will be required.

11.8.1 Energy Development: DM POL 27: To encourage renewable development proposals which contribute positively to reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint.

DM OBJ 76: In the assessment of individual energy development proposals, the Council will take the following criteria into account:

- The proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

- The environmental and social impacts of the proposed development.
- Traffic impacts including details of haul routes.
- Impact of the development on the landscape, (please refer to Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment).
- Impact on protected Views and Prospects, (please refer to Appendix 10 Protected Views and Prospects); Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Chapter 11
- Impact on public rights of way and walking routes, (please refer to Appendix 12 Public Rights of Way).
- Connection to the National Grid (where applicable).
- Mitigation features, where impacts are inevitable.
- Protection of designated areas - NHAs, SPAs and SACs, areas of archaeological potential and scenic importance.
- proximity to structures that are listed for protection, national monuments, etc. (Please refer to Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and Appendices 6-9 inclusive for further details).
- Cumulative Impact of proposal.

Wind Energy:

DM POL 28: To require compliance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines, (2006) and Circular PL20-13, and any updates thereof. Any proposal shall be supported by both a technical and an environmental statement prepared to an acceptable standard which sets out how the proposal complies with the Guidelines.

DM OBJ 78: To require that any pre-application discussion and/or planning application proposal for wind farm development sets out how the project complies with DM POL 28. **DM OBJ 79:** Topographical enclosures and extensive areas of degraded or previously developed lands should be identified for wind farm development to help minimise visual impacts and to harmonise wind turbines with the landscape.

DM OBJ 80: In general, matt finishes and neutral colours for turbines and structures are required.

DM OBJ 81: The Council will support appropriate innovative designs for wind farms.

DM OBJ 82: All planning applications shall be accompanied by detailed proposals for the restoration of the site after removal of the turbines and associated infrastructure Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Chapter 11 including access roads. Adequate financial security will be required to ensure site restoration and removal of the wind farm.

Energy Networks

In the assessment of individual proposals, the Council will take the criteria outlined in section 11.8.1 (Energy Development) into account.

The Proposed Development does not fall within an area that is environmentally sensitive as set out in the MCDP, it has been carefully sited to minimise visual and environmental impacts and it strengthens the renewable energy and energy objectives of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, supporting the renewable energy transition towards more sustainable forms of energy. It is therefore considered that the sensitive siting, design, and elements of the Proposed Development are appropriate for the area and is fully in compliance with the CDP.

An EIAR, Screening for Appropriate Assessment and NIS has been completed and accompanies this application under separate cover. The Proposed Development has been fully assessed, including the environmental constraints of the site. The findings confirm that with mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

4.6 Other Sector Relevant Policies

4.6.1 Commission for Regulation of Utilities: Enduring 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 4 April 2023, the CRU published its decision updating its earlier decision on ECP-2 and setting the policy for a single batch window opening in October 2023 for two months.

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.

Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited will apply for a grid connection for the Proposed Development through the ECP process subject to the receipt of a grant of planning permission which is required to qualify for an application.

4.6.2 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. Support schemes like RESS, in place all over the world, are a way of ensuring that renewable energy technologies are incentivised to replace the use of fossil fuels in our economy. Governments contract to buy electricity at a guaranteed price for the long term, typically a period of about fifteen years. This gives developers the certainty they need to build projects. A cornerstone of RESS is that communities should benefit directly from renewable electricity projects and the RESS-2 terms and conditions (the “RESS-1 T&Cs”) contain various community requirements.

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 80% electricity produced by renewable sources by 2030 as set out in the Climate Action Plan (2021).

In October of 2021 Government of Ireland published the 'Terms and Conditions for the Second Competition Under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme RESS 2 2021'. 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 second competition, RESS - 2. 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 provisional results of the RESS – 2 auctions were published in May 2022. Successful onshore wind projects accounted for up to approximately 414MW of capacity. The provision of the RESS schemes, along with the Enduring Connection Policy 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 (2021).

RESS 2 followed on from RESS – 1 and provides for a community benefit fund which will contribute €2/MWh for all RESS 2 Projects. The Good Practice Principles Handbook lays out a range of principles and guidance for Generators in order to ensure the successful operation and delivery of Community Benefit Funds, including the need to ensure community participation in fund decision-making via the establishment of a local committee, which should encourage successful dispersal of funds. Generators shall comply with the principles and guidance contained in the Good Practice Principles Handbook in the context of the operation and administration of the Community Benefit Fund for their particular RESS 2 Project.

RESS 3 was published in April of 2023. These RESS guidelines have minimal changes from RESS 1 and 2 that are of relevance to this planning application. However, it is worth noting that only projects which have a letter of offer for a grid connection may take place in the RESS 3 auction.

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. One such community requirement – the mandatory Community Benefit Fund – is the focus of this Handbook. The Generator or its agent will administer the funds contained in the Community Benefit Fund and shall distribute such funds for the duration of the relevant RESS 2 Project's. RESS 2 Support as follows on an annual basis:

- a) in respect of Onshore Wind RESS 2 Projects, a minimum of €1,000 shall be paid to each household located within a distance of a 1-kilometre radius from the RESS 2 Project.
- b) a minimum of 40% of the funds shall be paid to not-for-profit community enterprises whose primary focus or aim is the promotion of initiatives towards the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 4, 7, 11 and 13, including education, energy efficiency, sustainable energy, and climate action initiatives.
- c) a maximum of 10% of the funds may be spent on administration. This is to ensure successful outcomes and good governance of the Community Benefit Fund. The Generator may supplement this spend on administration from its own funds should it be deemed necessary to do so; and

- d) the balance of the funds shall be spent on: (i) initiatives successful in the annual application process, as proposed by clubs and societies and similar not-for-profit entities; and (ii) in respect of Onshore Wind RESS 2 Projects, on “near neighbour payments” for households located outside a distance of 1 kilometre from the RESS 2 Project but within a distance of 2 kilometres from such RESS 2 Project. The distance specified is from the base of the nearest turbine to the nearest part of the structure of the occupied residence, the location of which is identified in the postal geo-directory.

4.6.2.1 Near neighbour provisions (II) and (part of d)

Central to the commitments in RESS to enable communities to benefit from the development of renewable wind farms is the recognition that those living in closest proximity are most impacted by them. Their construction may cause direct inconvenience for a number of months and their ongoing existence may have some visual or noise impacts, for instance. Wind farm developers have traditionally engaged with and often provided benefit to such “near neighbours”, but there has been inconsistency in approach over the years. The research that informed the Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds indicated that it was desirable to lay out with clarity the concept that near neighbours should receive direct benefits from the wind farm. This was therefore defined as a requirement in the RESS – 2 T&Cs.

This formal requirement is intended as a recognition that modest annual payments are appropriate for near neighbours, but it is not intended to consume a substantial percentage of the Fund. The fundamental intention of the Fund is that the wider community benefits from the RESS Project’s existence. Near neighbours are a small subset of this wider catchment. It is fully expected that, apart from the direct benefit payments now mandated, near neighbours will benefit from the remainder of the Fund as it facilitates wider, community endeavours.

If the Proposed Development is successful in receiving planning consent, Knockanarragh Wind Farm Limited will apply for support for a community benefit fund through the RESS process. A community benefit fund will apply to the Proposed Development.

Under Section 12.4.1.1 of CAP24, it is understood that a community benefit fund will have to be set up irrespective of whether the Proposed Development participates in the RESS process. The community benefit fund for non-participating projects should be equivalent to the RESS requirements of €2/MWh.

For the Proposed Development, it would mean that there will be in the region of €300,000 per year available for the local community. The community benefit fund is further detailed in Chapter 4 of the EIAR.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Material Planning Considerations

The Climate and Energy Policy Framework 2030 was adopted in 2014 and includes EU-wide targets and policy objectives for the period between 2021-2030. It seeks to push for continued progress towards a low-carbon economy and to build a secure energy system that ensures affordable energy for all consumers and increase the security of supply of the EU’s energy supply. In line with EU targets, it sets targets of at least 40% reduction in green-house

gas emissions and at least 32% share of renewable energy from all energy consumed in the EU by 2030.

There is an overarching requirement to facilitate renewable energy development in particular onshore wind energy in order to meet targets in the Climate Action Plan. These legally binding objectives are set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This Act established legally binding frameworks and commitments to achieve targets.

All planning applications are determined on their individual merits with due consideration given to the overall planning balance of a scheme.

The Proposed Development, if granted, will contribute to the supply of national demand for renewable energy which will add to the national objectives of decarbonising to combat the climate emergency and add to the energy security of supply crisis we are currently experiencing as a result of the Ukrainian war.

Section 5.2 below outlines a snapshot of planning precedent with respect to Wind Farm Developments and highlights consistency in thinking amongst An Bord Pleanála inspectors and the Board, whereby it has been accepted that:

“where there is a wealth of European, national and regional policy all of which supports, promotes and encourages renewable energy developments including wind farm.....there is an urgent need to support the diversification and security of energy supplies.....On this basis I consider that the Board can proceed to determine the current application...in the absence of specific detailed and locational policies contained in the development plan, subject to assessing the development in the context of its impact on residential amenity and other environmental qualitative safeguards”. (Extract from ABP Inspectors Report (ABP-311565-21)).

This Report contains a comprehensive planning assessment of the Proposed Development. Our assessment notes that the Proposed Development is compliant with International, European, and National policy on energy security emissions reductions and renewable energy production. The Proposed Development is in compliance with local policies in the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Environmental impacts have been considered in the EIAR and NIS through the process of assessment, embedded mitigation, and additional proposed mitigation in the EIAR, the NIS and CEMP. It has been demonstrated that the Proposed Development can be constructed, operated, and decommissioned without any significant effects arising on the environment.

It is considered that the Proposed Development meets all criteria discussed in section 4.0 of this Planning Statement.

Chapter 2 of the EIAR discusses the community benefit fund and how the community team has engaged with the local community within 1.6km of each turbine. The developer has undertaken significant consultation in this regard in compliance with the Community Benefit Fund Good Practice Principles published in 2021, the Best Practice Guidelines for the Irish Wind Energy Industry and the IWEA Best Practice Principles in Community Engagement and Community Commitment 2013.

5.2 Planning Precedent

SLR have carried out a review of a number of decisions relating to Wind Farm development in the Republic of Ireland. The snapshot below highlights consistency in thinking amongst An Bord Pleanála inspectors and the Board, whereby it has been accepted that there is an overarching requirement to facilitate renewable energy development in particular onshore

wind energy in order to meet targets in the Climate Action Plan and comply with Section 15 of the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (as amended) which requires inter alia, An Bord Pleanála to perform its functions in a manner consistent with

- (a) the most recent approved climate action plan,
- (b) the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy,
- (c) the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans
- (d) the furtherance of the national climate objective and
- (e) the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State.”

Legally binding objectives are also set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This Act established legally binding frameworks and commitments to achieve targets. All planning applications are determined on their individual merits with due consideration given to the overall planning balance of a scheme.

In this context we note An Bord Pleanála’s assessment criteria concerning recently permitted Wind Farms in applying this approach, we note the following:

Reg. Ref: 301619-18: Moanvane Windfarm comprising 12 no. turbines and all associated works in Offaly County Council. This application was granted by Offaly County Council and An Bord Pleanála. In consenting the Moanvane Wind Farm Project, the Planning Inspector in Section 11 of the Planning Report considered the compliance of the project with national policy as an important factor before outlining the acceptability of impact at a local level, therefore balancing national need against local impacts.

Reg. Ref: ABP -311565-21: Bracklyn Wind Farm Limited, located in Westmeath and Meath County Council. This development consists of a Wind Farm Development including 9 turbines with a hub height of 104 metres and a rotor diameter of 162metres, providing an overall tip height of 185 metres together with all associated works. This development was granted permission on the 7th of July 2022 with conditions.

Westmeath County Council recommended refusal, due to concerns that the proposed development is contrary to many policies within the WCDP and contrary to the Wind Energy Guidelines.

8.2.7 It is clear from the above, that national policy acknowledges that significant increase in wind energy capacity will be required to meet the mandatory targets set out in the national targets on climate change.Additional wind generated energy will enable the decarbonisation of the electricity sector in line with European and national climate strategies.”

“8.2.9 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region.....specifically, RPO10.22 seeks to support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission and distribution network to facilitate the planned growth and transmission and distribution of renewable energy.”

“8.2.11 -It is noted that notwithstanding the above policies contained in the development plan, Westmeath County Council recommended that planning permission be refused specifically on the basis that the proposed development contravenes CPO10.1.45”.(Which seeks to direct largescale energy projects such as wind farms into areas of cutover and cutaway peatlands. The proposal is located on pastureland and forestry lands and therefore contravenes this policy).

“8.2.12 -However, having regard to the overarching policy statements contained in the various documents at national and local level, it is reasonable to assume that the proposed

development, subject to qualitative safeguards is acceptable in principle and in accordance with the overall goal of reducing reliance on fossil fuels and promoting and development in more sustainable forms of renewable energy within the State”.

In assessing the development against the provisions of CPO10.1.45, the An Bord Pleanála inspector noted the following:

“8.3.14 As in the case of Policy Objective 143¹², the requirement to limit wind farm development within the county to areas of cutover/cutaway peatlands severely curtails the potential of the county to meet national renewable energy targets. It is clear and unambiguous from the Draft Ministerial Direction, that it is both envisaged and required that County Westmeath contribute in delivering its share of overall government targets in respect of renewable energy and climate change. While the Board must have regard to policy provisions contained in the development plan, it is not required to slavishly adhere to all such policy statements. In the case of ordinary planning applications and appeals the Board is permitted to exercise its discretion under the criteria set out in Section 37(2)(b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 where the Planning Authority has issued as refusal on the basis that the proposal materially contravenes a policy statement contained in the development plan. It is respectfully suggested that if the criteria set out in Section 37(2)(b) were to be applied in this instance, it could be reasonably argued that the proposal complies with the criteria set out under:

- Section 37(2)(b)(i) – in that the proposed development is of strategic or national importance,*
- Section 37(2)(b)(ii) – in that there are conflicting objectives in the development plan insofar as the proposed development is concerned. In this regard I refer the Board to the previous section of my assessment which indicates that there are many policy statements and objectives contained in the development plan that generally support the provision of wind energy.*
- Section 37(2)(b)(iii) – in that the proposed development should be granted having regard to Regional Planning Guidelines for the area and other National Policy Guidelines (referred to in Section 7 above) including the Climate Action Plan and the National Planning Framework.*

8.3.15. On the basis of the above, I consider that the Board, notwithstanding the provisions of CPO10.146 can consider granting planning permission primarily on the basis of the overarching national policy objectives in relation to the promotion of renewable energy targets within the State.

8.3.16. Therefore, if the Board do come to the conclusion that the proposal is a material contravention of the plan, it can grant planning permission in light of the provisions of S.37(2)(b) of the Act.

The Inspector is clearly outlining the urgency and the need at European and National level in providing renewable energy development to provide energy security and move away from fossil fuels. The Inspector has taken the view that European and national policy can weigh heavily in favour of granting planning permission, even where it is contrary to local policy “*subject to assessing the development in the context of its impact on residential amenity and other environmental qualitative safeguards*”.

The Inspector recommended granting permission for the Proposed Development and the Board decided to grant permission generally in accordance with the Inspectors Report and

¹² Draft WCDP Policy regarding separation distances removed by Ministerial Direction.

on the basis that the proposed development ‘*would make a positive contribution to Ireland’s national strategic policy on renewable energy and its move to a low carbon future.*’

Reg. Ref: ABP 308885 Coom Green Energy Park, located in Cork. The proposed development is for the construction of up to 22 no. wind turbines and all related site works and ancillary development. This application was granted permission by An Bord Pleanála on the 9th of November 2023. In assessing the application, the Inspector noted the following:

“It would contribute to the achievement of European and National renewable energy targets, and in particular the objectives of the Climate Action Plan (2023) which seeks to reduce the State’s greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030, including a target of 9 GW from onshore wind. Providing the physical infrastructure, in this instance onshore wind turbines, to facilitate the achievements of this measure is critical thereby providing a demonstrable need for the proposed development.”

With regard to the location of the proposed development, the Inspector made the following observation:

“While it is noted that many of the submissions reference their agreement in principle in respect of merits of renewable energy, there is resistance to the location of such a proposal within the locality for the range of reasons outlined in the summary of submissions received above. In order to address Climate Change, I would suggest that other elements of our environment and the context within which the environment is perceived must also change. This includes in particular the visual context of an area which cannot be expected to remain unchanged in perpetuity but particularly within the context of a climate emergency.”

5.3 Conclusion

This Planning Statement has set out the rationale for the Proposed Development and has provided a response with respect to development and assessment criteria set out in the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), with respect to Strategic Infrastructure Development, the National Planning Framework, the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, the Meath County Development Plan 2017-2027, the Governments Section 28 Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 (WEG’s) and the Draft Wind Energy Guidelines 2019.

The policy as described throughout this report sets out significant international, European, national, regional, 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.

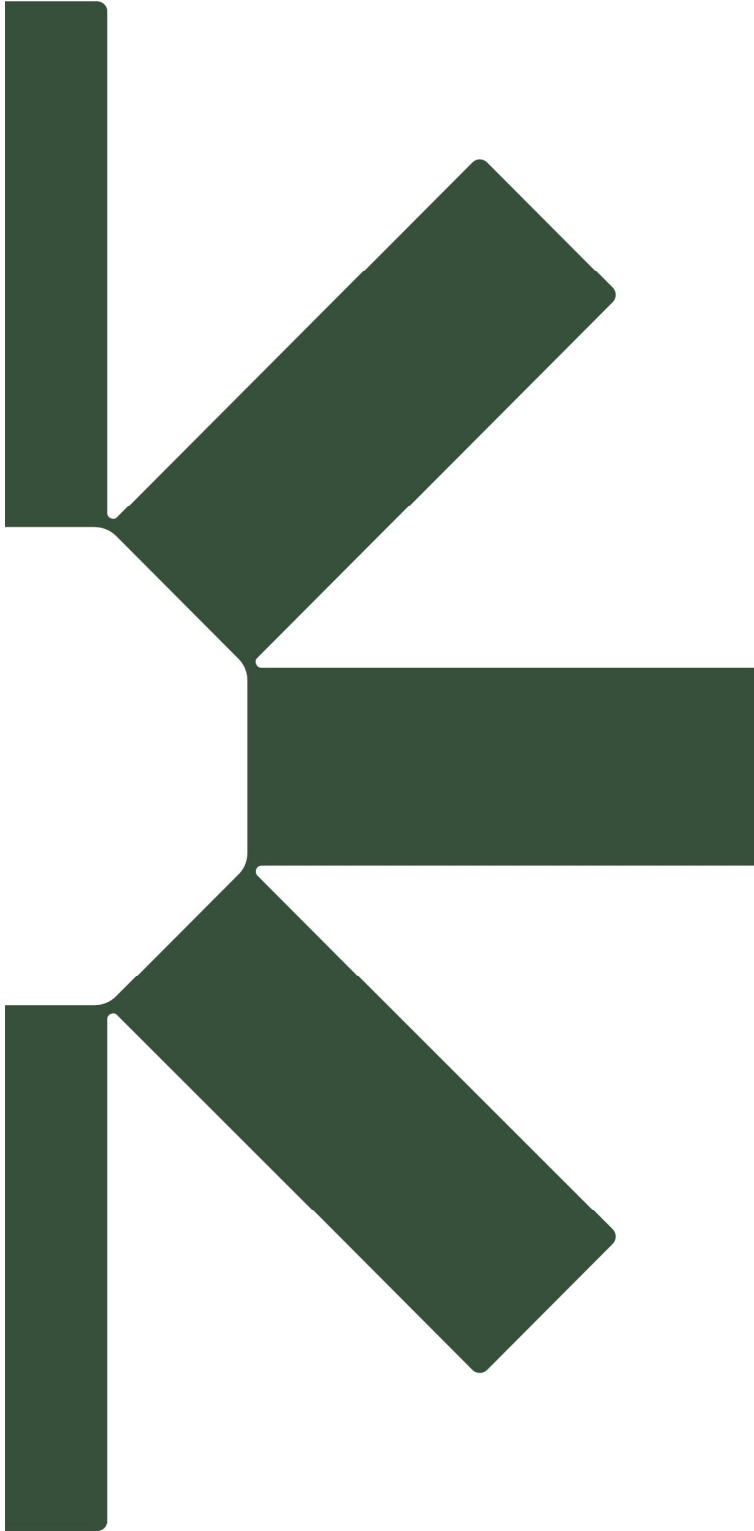
While Ireland has come a long way in increasing renewable energy generation, the targets are ever increasing from a European perspective. 2050 European targets effectively mean that Europe’s energy production will have to be almost carbon-free by 2050. The Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030. Notably Section 11, ‘Electricity’ provides a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of providing 9 GW Onshore wind by 2030. The emissions reduction targets by sector to 2030 for the Electricity Sector are also set at 25-75%.

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.

Reg. Ref: ABP -311565-21 also sets the precedent for granting the Proposed Development on the basis that it 'would make a positive contribution to Ireland's national strategic policy on renewable energy and its move to a low carbon future.'

We trust that An Bord Pleanála will have regard to the above. In doing so we respectfully request that An Bord Pleanála give due regard to national objectives and Climate Action Plan 2023 and 2024 to support wind energy development as part of the International, European, and National binding policies to increase the use of renewable energy.



Making Sustainability Happen