

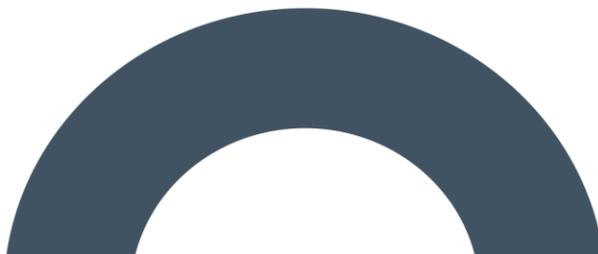


## **APPENDIX 2-1**

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

# Community Engagement Report

Clonberne Wind Farm, Co  
Galway





## DOCUMENT DETAILS

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Report has been compiled by MKO and Clonberne Windfarm Ltd to document the processes of community engagement and public consultation carried out during the pre-planning phase of the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm (the 'Proposed Project') in Co. Galway.

The Community Engagement Report sets out the aims and objectives of a proactive programme of community engagement and public consultation activities, spread out across a period of more than four years during the pre-planning phase of the Proposed Project.

It will outline the steps Clonberne Windfarm Ltd have taken to achieve these objectives and further demonstrate the developers' commitment to an ongoing dialogue with local residents up to and beyond the submission of an application for planning permission.

Clonberne Windfarm Ltd have placed transparent and open engagement with the community at the forefront of their plans for the Proposed Project since project inception. The developers believe that effective and timely community consultation is important to ensure that the voices of communities are heard. Engaging with stakeholders enables developers of projects to understand their needs, their preferences and their expectations. It can also help to build trust between the community and the developers.

These community engagement activities have been completed in line with the recommendations as set out in the *Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines (December 2019) – Community Engagement* which state that developers of proposed wind farms should, in advance of submitting applications for planning permission, take:

*“Active steps to: inform local communities as they begin to develop their proposals; take the views of local communities into account in designing their proposals; demonstrate what practical effect that process of engagement has had; and, set out how the project will perform as a good neighbour in the context of the long-term economic and social development of the community or communities within which it is situated.”*

All community engagement and public consultation activities have been carried out according to the fundamental principle that proactive consultation and open discussion with local stakeholders is a crucial element of any wind energy project. In carrying out these community engagement activities, Clonberne Windfarm Ltd endeavoured to put the community at the heart of the process to ensure meaningful consultation was carried out. This, in turn, generated goodwill and constructive feedback, which made a tangible impact on the final project design.

## 1.1 Background to Community Engagement

MKO was appointed to serve as the lead planning and environmental consultants on the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm in the summer of 2018. MKO's role in the project involved the compilation of the application for planning permission, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. MKO's role also included community engagement activities. These activities were initially carried out by members of the planning and environmental teams. Upon the establishment of a dedicated Project Communications unit within MKO in 2022, the responsibilities for community engagement and public consultation were passed to this new unit.

MKO devised a Community Engagement Strategy (CES) which set out the steps involved in the community consultation approach and introduced a phased timeline for the successful rollout of the engagement process. The developers were cognisant at all times of the need to include the local community in every stage of the process and to ensure openness, transparency and inclusiveness in the development of the project.

MKO took responsibility for all aspects of the community engagement process. Contained within the CES were detailed plans for the specific steps to be followed in the engagement process, with the appropriate methods and means of public consultation identified.

MKO also took responsibility for the role of Community Liaison Officer (CLO), the purpose of which is to serve as a link between the developers and the local community. The CLO has remained available, via a dedicated phone line and email address, over the entirety of the public consultation process to field questions and concerns from members of the local community and relate these back to the developers. Owen Cahill of MKO has served as CLO on the Proposed Project.

1.2

## Objectives of the Community Engagement Process

Before the process of community consultation was initiated, it was important to make clear the specific objectives and goals of the process. The overarching philosophy of the project team was to manage communications around the Proposed Project, to provide clear, accurate and timely information to members of the local community, and to provide the means and opportunities by which the local community could give their feedback, ask questions, or voice concerns about the Proposed Project.

As such, the primary objectives of the community engagement process were as follows:

- To put the needs of the local community at the centre of the engagement process
- To identify the appropriate groups with whom to engage, based on their proximity to the Proposed Project and the impact the development was likely to have on their day-to-day lives
- To reach out to the community in a manner that was timely, proactive and respectful
- To identify the main concerns expressed by members of the community in relation to the Proposed Project and to address these concerns as comprehensively as possible
- To establish and maintain an open, two-way dialogue between the developers and the local community for the duration of the development process, beginning in the pre-planning phase and continuing through to project realisation and operation
- To counteract the potential spread of speculation and misinformation relating to the Proposed Project

The Community Engagement Strategy, in which the process of community consultation was laid out, was an evolving document which could be continually reviewed and amended throughout the consultation process to reflect the specific demands of the project as they were encountered and to integrate community feedback.

2.

## CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Once the objectives of the community engagement process were established, the project team set out on the implementation of the strategy. A range of different methodologies were deployed over the course of the process; these included, but were not limited to:

- The setting up of a dedicated project email address and CLO phone number
- The design and development of a project website with frequently updated information on the project and contact information
- Door-to-door engagement with residents within a 1.25km radius of the Proposed Project
- Wider consultation with groups, clubs and businesses within a 5km radius of the development, to consist of a mailout of an introductory letter and a project brochure, with additional follow-up meetings held when requested
- Meetings with prominent community groups
- Direct engagement with local political representatives including local councillors, TDs and senators
- A Virtual Consultation Room on the project website
- A Public Information Event

Some of these resources – such as the CLO service and the project website – were available throughout the consultation period. Others were rolled out according to a pre-planned timeline, which sought to ensure that the residents likely to be most impacted by the Proposed Project were consulted with first before the focus of the consultation activities widened out to the community as a whole.

The below is an outline of these activities based on that timeline.

2.1

### Meeting with Clonberne Community Council

The first form of direct engagement with the local community in relation to the Proposed Project was a meeting with the Clonberne Community Council (CCC) at the Enterprise Centre in Clonberne village on January 16th, 2020. In attendance were Brian Keville and Owen Cahill of MKO and John Carton on behalf of Clonberne Windfarm Ltd.

The meeting was co-chaired by Gerry Walsh and John Kearney, who made clear at the outset of the meeting that while individual members of the CCC may have their own personal feelings toward the Proposed Project, the council itself was not taking a stance either in favour of or in opposition to the project.

Brian Keville provided an initial overview of the project in terms of the viability of the site and the surveys that had been completed to date. He also provided the most up-to-date layout of the Proposed Project and the options being explored in relation to the grid connection.

The meeting was then opened to the floor for questions. Several attendees asked questions of the project team on topics including:

1. *The visual impact of the turbines*
2. *The noise implications of the Proposed Project*
3. *The duration of the construction period*
4. *The grid connection route and potential road disruptions*
5. *The potential commencement date for construction works*
6. *The potential health implications of the project*
7. *The economic benefits offered by the Proposed Project to the local community*
8. *The ownership of the wind farm into the future*

9. *The potential impact on local property prices*
10. *The impact on local birdlife, e.g. geese, and the bird surveys completed to date*
11. *A possible reduction in commercial rates associated with the Proposed Project*
12. *The tax obligations regards potential benefits*

Each of these questions were answered in turn by Brian Keville and/or other members of the project team.

1. *The geometry and scale of the turbines involved was explained and an offer was made to facilitate a site visit to an existing wind farm with turbines of a similar scale. The wind farm suggested was Oweninny in Co Mayo which has turbines of a similar size to those proposed for Clonberne, albeit in a different landscape*
2. *It was explained that noise output of the turbines would adhere to national guidelines*
3. *The duration of construction of a wind farm at this scale was explained as being approximately 12 months*
4. *It was explained that the grid connection would be routed off-road insofar as possible, but where use of the public road was necessary, stop/go systems, local access and temporary diversions would be provided as required*
5. *The requirements of obtaining planning permission and entering the RESS auction were outlined, and the start of 2022 suggested as the earliest possible commencement date (\*this estimate was provided before the onset of Covid-19).*
6. *It was explained that there is no evidence of harmful effects caused by wind turbines, and that there is material available online which is inaccurate*
7. *The Community Benefit Fund (CBF) was explained. The CBF is calculated at €2 per MWh, and could potentially provide up to €250k per annum to be distributed to clubs, schools, community groups, etc in the locality. The payment scheme for near neighbours of a minimum payment of €1k per year for homes within 1km of a turbine was also outlined*
8. *John Carton explained it was the intention of Cregmore Construction (the parent company of Clonberne Windfarm Ltd) to retain the ownership of the site. He added that whoever owned or operated the site in the future would be obliged to comply with the conditions of planning*
9. *It was explained that there was no evidence that proximity to a wind farm or wind turbine had any negative impact on property prices*
10. *The ornithological surveys that had been carried out at the site up to that point were detailed, and it was explained that a third winter of studies was necessary*
11. *It was explained that it was unlikely that the development of the wind farm would lead to a reduction in commercial rates in the area*
12. *Regards the tax obligations associated with the benefit payments, the meeting was told that everyone's relationship with Revenue was their own*

## 2.2 Door-to-door Consultation

Following on from the meeting with the Community Council, a programme of door-knocking was initiated. This process began in late January 2020. It was agreed that the first phase of door-to-door engagement would include homes within a 1.25km radius of a turbine, according to the most up-to-date layout designs.

The information provided via door-to-door consultation was to include:

- A project information leaflet laying out the background to the project, the viability of the chosen site, details about the site developer and MKO, and the progress of the plans to date
- A discussion about the project in general, and an opportunity for the homeowners to ask any questions they may have

It was agreed prior to commencement that a turbine layout would not be presented at the initial door-knock. This was because the layout had yet to be finalised and was still subject to changes brought about by the ongoing site surveys and assessment works.

This door-to-door engagement took in late-January and February of 2020. The list of homes visited consisted of 3 houses within 750m of a turbine site, 15 houses between 750m and 1km from a turbine site, and 37 houses between 1km and 1.25km from a turbine site. In total, 55 houses within 1.25km of a turbine site were visited by the project team.

The feedback from members of the local community during this initial stage of door-knocking was largely neutral. Some of the residents had concerns about certain elements of the Proposed Project, in particular the height of the turbines, the visual impact, and noise. A large proportion of the residents stressed the importance of consultation with the local community and the need to keep the lines of communication open.

Some of the residents were in strong opposition to the Proposed Project at this early stage of engagement. More specific issues including health concerns, property values, issues with sleep, noise pollution, the risks to migrating birds, sunlight flicker, the effects on television and internet signals, whether the income from the CBF is taxable, whether the parish and/or individual homes would receive cheaper or free electricity from the Proposed Project, and what would happen to the wind turbines at the end of their life-cycle in 25 to 30 years, were all raised.

Members of the project team answered these concerns as thoroughly as possible during these initial consultation activities and in instances in which members of the local community requested that further information be provided, these requests were responded to with the most detailed information available at this point of the project's development.

### 2.2.1 Impact of Covid-19

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and the subsequent lockdowns caused severe disruption to the community engagement process, and to the progress of the Proposed Project as a whole. The continuation of door-to-door engagement became impossible, and nor was it possible to host an in-person Public Information Event, as had been the intention prior to the onset of the pandemic.

The lines of communication remained opened throughout lockdown, however, and there was ongoing engagement with the local community through phone calls and emails over the remainder of 2020 and into 2021, even as it became apparent that the project would face significant delays as a direct consequence of the pandemic.

## 2.3 Resumption of Consultation Activities

Public consultation activities restarted in August 2021 with a letter drop to homes located between 1.25km and 1.5km from the turbine sites. It had not been possible to engage in-person with these homeowners prior to lockdown.

The letter, which was hand-delivered to approximately 50 homes within the 1.25km to 1.5km radius, explained that surveys and assessments on the site of the Proposed Project were still ongoing, and that the process of consultation was restarting after the unavoidable delays caused by the pandemic.

The letter was accompanied by a project leaflet, which included project-specific information and a site location map.

The letter also reminded residents of the various platforms available to them to communicate with the CLO and the project team, including phone and email, and the offer to facilitate a virtual meeting

through Zoom. This offer was made because some Covid-19 restrictions were still in place at the time and the project team did not wish to expose any members of the public to the unnecessary risk of an in-person meeting.

## 2.4 Project Website

A dedicated project website (<https://www.clonbernewindfarm.com>) was designed and went live on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the immediate aftermath of the Public Information Event. The website was regularly updated with the latest information over the following months as the project plans took shape. The website contained an FAQ section answering the most frequently asked questions about the Proposed Project, as well as details about the government's wind energy policies under the Climate Action Plan. The website also contained contact information for the project CLO.

### 2.4.1 Virtual Consultation Room

The Virtual Consultation Room (VCR) went live on the project website on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the same day as the in-person Public Information Event was held in Clonberne. The VCR ([https://seekbeak.com/v/A0zr67E\[zvQ\]](https://seekbeak.com/v/A0zr67E[zvQ])) is an interactive online space which contained all of the information which was being shown to the public at the in-person event. This represented the most detailed and up-to-date project information publicly released up to that point, including:

- Specific locations for the proposed 11 turbines
- An introduction to the project and a list of the environmental and economic benefits for the local community
- An explanation of how the Community Benefit Fund can benefit Clonberne and the surrounding areas
- Maps showing the distances between the proposed turbine sites and their nearest dwellings, roads, etc
- Aerial imaging of the site showing the broader location of the wind farm site relative to the nearest settlements of Dunmore, Glenamaddy and Moylough
- A map of the proposed Turbine Delivery Route (TDR)
- A map of the proposed Grid Connection Route
- A map showing the relevant constraints, such as dwellings, watercourses, designated areas and ecological habitats
- Pictures of a typical 110kV substation of the kind being proposed in the Proposed Project at that time
- Further information on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), the planning process and the planned next steps
- Photomontage impressions showing what the turbines, if built, would look like from several locations surrounding the development site at varying distances and angles

### 3. PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENT

A Public Information Event (PIE) for the Proposed Project was held on Thursday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from 3pm to 8pm. The event was held in the Community Centre in Clonberne, the closest suitable venue to the site of the Proposed Project.

The purpose of the event was to provide up-to-date updates on the progress of the Proposed Project to local residents and other interested parties. This was of particular importance given that the impact of the pandemic and multiple lockdowns, combined with other unavoidable delays to the project, meant that nearly three years had passed since the initial door-knocking exercise had taken place. Consultation had been ongoing during that period, but the project team felt it was critical to provide a update on the state of affairs at this time.

#### 3.1 Event Advertisement

To bring the PIE to the attention of as many people as possible, a newspaper advert was placed in the local newspaper, *The Tuam Herald*, in its edition of Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, eight days out from the event.

A leaflet drop was also carried out to homes within 2km of the proposed turbine locations one week out from the PIE, to ensure that as many of the local residents as possible were made aware of the event. The event was also advertised in the local Clonberne newsletter a week in advance.

#### 3.2 Event Format

The event was attended by members of the project team from both Clonberne Windfarm Ltd and MKO, including:

- > Johnny Mullins, Clonberne Windfarm Ltd
- > John Carton, Clonberne Windfarm Ltd
- > Owen Cahill, MKO
- > Brian Keville, MKO
- > Michael Watson, MKO
- > Toni Bourke, MKO

The event was formatted in an exhibition-type layout; the informational posters, maps and drawings were printed on A1-size paper and mounted on standing boards on either side of the hall. The two sides of the hall were mirror-images of one another, allowing for attendees to view and examine the information on display even during busier periods of the event.

A welcome desk was set up at the entrance to the hall and attendees given the option upon arrival of signing-in and leaving their email address to be included on a mailing list for future project updates. Attendees were then given the option of being brought through the exhibition by a member of the project team (if one was available) or studying the materials at their own pace before directing any questions or comments they may have had to a member of the project team.

In addition to the informational posters and maps, the exhibition included photomontage booklets with graphic impressions showing what the Proposed Project would look like, if built, from various distances away from the site. Two of these booklets were set out in the hall, alongside a mounted map showing the viewpoints associated with each set of photomontages relative to the wider area map. These photomontages, as with all other materials exhibited at the PIE, went live on the project website and VCR on the same day as the event.

The Public Information Event was very well attended, with approximately 160 attendees over the course of the five hours. Feelings toward the Proposed Project varied significantly amongst the attendees; some members of the local community were broadly supportive of the development and others were curious to learn more about the plans, while some of the attendees were in strong opposition to the development and made their positions known to the project team.

Several attendees were interested to learn more about the Community Benefit Fund associated with the Proposed Project, asking specific questions over how the fund would be administered, what sort of projects the fund would be made available for, and whether the direct payments arising from the fund would be subject to taxation.

### 3.2.1 Biodiversity Brochure

Also available at the Public Information Event, printed and laid out for attendees to take away with them, were biodiversity brochures. These brochures, which drew upon the ecological and ornithological surveys that had been carried out at the site of the Proposed Project up to that point, featured information on the various habitats that had been identified on the site, such as peatlands and woodlands, and examples of some of the species of plants and animals that had been surveyed up to that point, such as badgers, bats and bird species like hen harrier and kingfisher.

## 4. POST-EVENT CONSULTATION

### 4.1 Ongoing CLO Communication

From the end of 2022 and over the course of 2023, there was ongoing communication between members of the local community and the project Community Liaison Officer, representing the project developers. This communication took place predominantly via email and phone and was predominantly concerned with the same themes that had been encountered earlier in the consultation process, such as visual and noise impact, property prices, etc.

### 4.2 Gurteen/Cloonmore Group Water Scheme Society Ltd Meeting - November 2022

A number of interactions in the form of calls and emails were shared between the CLO and the Chairman of the Gurteen/Cloonmore Group Water Scheme (GWS) Society Ltd from late 2021. Initial interactions related to project information as well as consent with regard site investigation and monitor of a water source in proximity to the Proposed Project site of which the Gurteen/Cloonmore GWS is supplied from, details of which are included in the EIAR.

On the establishment of the findings of all such site investigation and monitoring, a meeting was held with the Gurteen/Cloonmore GWS Society Ltd. In attendance were Brian Keville and Owen Cahill of MKO along with the committee. This meeting included a presentation by MKO of:

- > Site Layout Maps for the Proposed Project
- > Site Layout relative to the Zone of Contribution of the water source
- > Details of the site monitoring undertaken throughout the site of the Proposed Project and at the source
- > Groundwater contour data
- > Refinement of the Zone of Contribution

The concluding outcomes of the site assessment and subsequent reporting is that the source will not be impacted by the Proposed Project with various mitigation proposals discussed with the committee.

Further subsequent discussions were held with the Chairman of the Gurteen/Cloonmore GWS Society Ltd and a concluding agreement that the committee would be notified of intended planning application lodgement dates which was agreed.

### 4.3 Clonberne Action Group Committee Meeting - May 2023

The first form of direct engagement with the Clonberne Action Group Committee in relation to the Proposed Project was a meeting held at the MKO Offices on May 3rd, 2023. In attendance were Brian Keville and Owen Cahill of MKO, Johnny Mullins and John Walsh on behalf of Clonberne Windfarm Ltd. The meeting was attended on behalf of the Clonberne Action Group Committee by Carole Morrow, Peter Morrow and Enda Mannion.

The Clonberne Action Group Committee set out that they were opposed to the project and had a number of questions for the developer and consultants. It was also stated that the Clonberne Action Group Committee would not answer any question posed at the meeting on them.

The meeting was then opened for questions on topics including:

- The potential or feasibility of wind energy resolving the climate crisis
- The percentage of CO<sub>2</sub> losses that are manmade
- The contribution of sunspots to climate change
- The power distribution from the Proposed Project, where will the electricity be utilised
- The suitability of the site for the Proposed Project and how it was selected
- Discussions around carbon balance and the carbon loss calculation which would be presented within the planning application
- Biodiversity Net Gain opportunity for the site

Further points of discussion were held around project timeline and a request that the Clonberne Action Group Committee would be notified of intended lodgement dates which was agreed.

No further engagement was requested or held after this date.

#### 4.4 Updated Letter Drop – January 2024

An update letter was hand-delivered to houses within a 2km radius of a proposed turbine location on Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The letter, which was delivered to almost 250 homes over the course of the day, set out the current state of play of the project plans. It thanked residents for the patience while the project was met with unavoidable delays, primarily due to the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. It outlined that there had been some minor changes to the locations of some of the turbines since they had been presented to the public at the Public Information Event in November 2022, and explained that these changes, along with all of the most up-to-date project plans, could be viewed on the project website and VCR.

Updated maps showing the minor changes to the turbine layout were uploaded to the project website on the same day as the letter drop.

The letter went on to say that the developers hoped to be in a position to submit an application for planning permission for the Proposed Project to An Bord Pleanála before the end of February 2024. It noted that the application, when submitted, will be advertised in the national media and via site notices erected around the perimeter of the site.

The letter reminded residents that the community engagement process remained ongoing and again invited any members of the community with questions or concerns to get in contact with the project CLO, whose contact email was included in the letter.

On the reverse of the letter was printed the most up-to-date site layout for the Proposed Project, which included the minor changes to the locations of some of the turbines since the PIE.

5.

## FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process for the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm has taken place over a span of more than four years, from the initial door-knocking in the winter of 2019 to most recent update in January 2024. This has been primarily due to delays in the project brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns.

The processes of consultation have been ongoing throughout this period. The CLO email and phone lines have remained opened and available at all times, as has, since November 2022, the project website and the Virtual Consultation Room. This ongoing consultation has been punctuated by more direct engagement efforts, beginning with the initial door-knocks and mailouts and moving through the Public Information Event and, most recently, the updated letter drop.

Over the course of the consultation period, several recurring themes have emerged as central to the concerns held by some members of the local community regarding the Proposed Project. This section will detail these concerns and how they were addressed by the project team.

5.1

### Main Concerns Raised

The main concerns raised by local residents over the course of the community engagement process on the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm were:

1. *Turbine height and visual impact*
2. *Noise impact*
3. *Impact on personal health*
4. *Impact on property prices / planning permission*
5. *Proximity to homes*
6. *Shadow flicker*
7. *Impact on local wildlife*
8. *The Community Benefit Fund*
9. *Project decommissioning*

5.1.1

### Turbine Height And Visual Impact

The most common concern raised over the course of the community engagement process was the height of the turbines, and their visual impact on the landscape. Some members of the local community argued strongly that the chosen site was not an appropriate location for turbines of up to 180m in height and questioned why the site had been chosen. Some residents questioned why onshore wind farms are still being developed, and why turbines are not being located out to sea instead.

In response to these concerns, the project team highlighted over the course of the engagement process that the site had been chosen because:

- The area has been categorised in the *County Galway Wind Energy Strategy* in the *Galway County Development Plan, 2022-2028*, as being ‘acceptable in principle’ and ‘open to consideration’
- The site has reasonable access to the national grid
- The site has good annual wind speeds
- The site is not a Special Area of Conservation, a Special Protection Area, or a National Heritage Area

Furthermore, when asked why the turbines were not being located out to sea, the project team explained that Ireland is pursuing an approach of developing both its on- and off-shore wind capacity in order to help meet the State's 2030 Climate Action targets, and while more off-shore wind farms are likely to be developed in the coming years, it is still crucial to pursue viable opportunities for on-shore wind.

It was also explained to residents that for the wind farm to be as efficient as possible, it needs to make use of the most advanced technology currently available, which is why the turbines in the Proposed Project have a greater height, and consequently a higher MW output, than some pre-existing turbines.

## 5.1.2 Noise Impact

Some residents expressed their concerns over the noise emitted by the turbines while in motion. Residents, particularly those living closest to a turbine site, had concerns that the noise would prevent them from being sleep and would cause other long-term harmful effects on their and their families' health.

In response, residents were told that modern turbine technologies are designed to produce as little noise as possible, and that the development would be required by law to abide by national guidelines, and also by any specific conditions set out by the planning authorities regarding the noise emissions from the turbines.

## 5.1.3 Impact on Personal Health

Some members of the local community had concerns that the turbines would have damaging effects on their health. These concerns were based primarily on information sourced online which was often poorly-evidenced and inaccurate. Residents were told that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that proximity to a wind turbine or a wind farm has any harmful effects on human health.

## 5.1.4 Impact On Property Prices / Planning Permission

Several members of the community who owned homes in the area had concerns over the impact the Proposed Project could have on the value of their properties. They feared that the proximity to a wind farm would cause the value of their properties to drop, should they attempt to sell. Some residents also held the view that it would be more difficult or even impossible to obtain planning permission to build new private dwellings in the area, should the Proposed Project go ahead.

In response, the project team said that there is no evidence in the Irish context of proximity to a wind farm having any effect, negative or positive, on property values in the area. Property values in areas close to wind farms are far more sensitive to the wider economic market forces which dictate property prices nationwide. Furthermore, residents were directed toward research conducted in Scotland between 1995 and 2014 which showed that the effect of a wind farm on nearby house prices was essentially zero.

Residents were also informed that there is no evidence to suggest that proximity to a wind turbine should be any impediment to obtaining planning permission for a private dwelling.

## 5.1.5 Proximity to Homes

Members of the community whose homes were close to or on the 750m buffer from a turbine site expressed their concerns over the proximity of the turbines, describing their fear of the potential for the turbines to 'loom over' their homes.

These residents were assured that the design layout has adhered to the proximity guidelines as set out in the *Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2019*, which state that the distance between a turbine and the nearest dwelling should be no less than four times the full tip height of the turbine. In the case of the Proposed Project, with turbines of up to 180m in tip height, the dwelling buffer is 720m (180m x 4), and this guideline has been adhered to.

### 5.1.6 Shadow Flicker

Related to the concerns over proximity were fears over 'shadow flicker', with some residents expressing their fears that shadows from the rotating turbines would impact on their homes. These residents were assured that any possible shadow flicker experienced at any property would not exceed the limits outlined in the *Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines*.

### 5.1.7 Impact on Wildlife

Some concerns were expressed by the community over the potentially harmful impact the construction and operation of the wind turbines could have on wildlife, particularly the local species and migratory birds.

In response, the project team assured those who expressed these concerns that a full Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) would be included with the planning application upon submission, which would contain reports from the extensive ecological and ornithological surveys carried out at the site over recent years.

The site constraints maps which were displayed at the Public Information Event showed that the turbines had been located in positions designed to make as little ecological impact as possible and are mandated not to encroach within designated buffer distances of watercourses, marsh habitats and other ecological constraints.

### 5.1.8 The Community Benefit Fund

The structure and administration of the Community Benefit Fund was a recurrent theme over the course of the engagement process. While members of the local community were generally enthusiastic about the prospect of the fund and the opportunities it could provide for the local area, they had specific questions over how it would be administered, and who would ultimately have final say over how the funds are used.

It was explained by the project team that the fund would be administered by a dedicated committee made up of members of the local community, with one committee member representing the developers. The fund would be used for direct payments to near neighbours (generally, dwellings within 1km of a turbine) and for environmentally sustainable projects in the area, such as installing EV-charging points or retrofitting community buildings. Local community groups, sports clubs, etc will also be able to apply directly to the committee to benefit from the fund.

### 5.1.9 Project Decommissioning

Some residents asked what would happen to the components of the wind turbines at the end of their life cycle and expressed concerns about the carbon footprint of disposing of the turbines. In response, the project team explained that the vast majority of the components of the wind turbines, including the concrete foundations and the steel in the hardstands, can be recycled upon the turbine's decommissioning. It may also be possible, when it comes time to decommission the turbines in 25-30 years' time, that the blades themselves can be recycled and/or repurposed.

## Influence of Community Engagement on the Project Design

The various issues raised by the local over the course of the consultation process had a significant impact on the final design of the project. At all stages of the design process, the developers were fully conscious of the need to minimise the levels of disruption caused by the project for the local community, both during the construction and the operational phases.

Throughout the pre-planning phase of the project, developers were conscious of the concerns held by some residents over issues such as the proximity, visual impact and noise impact of the development. These issues were raised repeatedly by a group of local residents over the course of the community consultation process and consequently, the developers were aware of the need to assure the residents that none of the turbines would be closer than the guideline minimum distance of four times the total tip height away from an occupied dwelling, and that all practical considerations to limit the impact of the turbines on the local residents were being taken into account in the design process.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the outset of the Proposed Project, Clonberne Windfarm Ltd and MKO made the best interests of the local community a primary consideration of the project. Through meaningful face-to-face, written, telephone and online contact, the community consultation process has been effective, open and transparent.

Clonberne Windfarm Ltd has engaged and consulted with the local community from an early stage of the pre-planning phase of the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm development. This process of community engagement has proven highly valuable as a means of identifying the key concerns of the local community in relation to the Proposed Project, and the issues raised by local residents during the consultation process have informed and shaped the project proposal in several ways.

The development of the proposed Clonberne Wind Farm will provide a direct and prolonged economic benefit to the communities surrounding the site through the Community Benefit Fund, and through employment opportunities during the construction process. The developers are committed to maintaining the strong community engagement approach throughout the post-application stage and, if planning permission is granted, will continue to consult with and be available to residents through the construction and operational lifespan of the Clonberne Wind Farm.