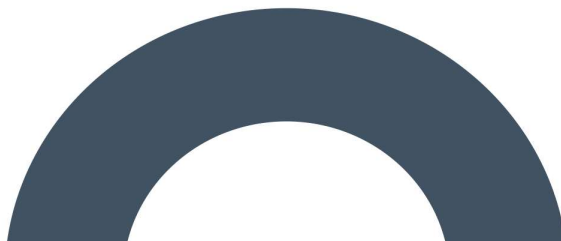


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Community Engagement Report

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Appendix 2-2



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DOCUMENT DETAILS

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Project Number: **231103**

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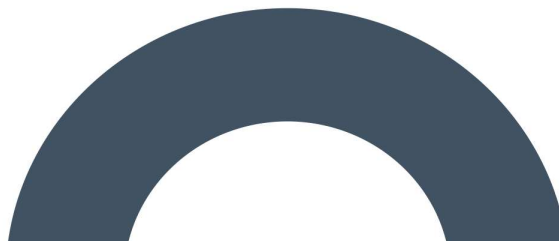
Planning and
Environmental
Consultants

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Report was prepared by MKO on behalf of Seskin Renewable Energy Limited (a subsidiary of Atlantic Infrastructure Renewables (AIR)) to document the process of community consultation and public engagement during the pre-planning phase of the eight-turbine Seskin Renewables Wind Farm ('the Proposed Development') that straddles the border between County Laois and County Kilkenny. AIR is an Irish-owned company based in Co Limerick.

The report sets out how the objectives of a proactive community engagement approach have been met and further demonstrates AIR's commitment to a programme of ongoing engagement with the local community over the lifespan of the project.

This report will outline the steps that AIR have taken since project inception to ensure transparent community engagement through all phases of the project to date. It will also demonstrate the values and objectives applied by AIR to the processes of public consultation and stakeholder engagement. Effective and timely community consultation is important to ensure that communities have a say and are heard. Engaging with stakeholders enables developers of projects to understand their needs, their preferences and their expectations. It can also help build trust.

This report has been prepared in line with the requirements as set out in the Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines (December 2019) – Community Engagement which state that developers of 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 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, AIR put the community at the heart of the process to ensure meaningful consultation was carried out which generated goodwill and feedback.

1.1 Background to Community Consultation

Prior to the commencement of community engagement, AIR appointed MKO to consult on the process. MKO devised a Community Engagement Strategy 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 this critical project.

Initial meetings were held between AIR and MKO in September 2024, prior to the commencement of the public consultation process. The purpose of these meetings was to establish the specific goals of the consultation programme and to plot out the steps required.

Arising from these meetings, Morland and Property Services Ltd, Director Edward Moran was appointed as Community Liaison Officer (CLO) on the project, with responsibility for acting as the point of contact for members of the public with questions or queries about the Proposed Development. A dedicated CLO email address and phone number were established in September 2024 to allow members of the public to communicate directly with the project team.

1.1.1

Objectives of Community Consultation

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 Seskin Renewables Wind Farm, 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 lodge complaints about the Proposed Development.

As such, the primary objectives of the community consultation 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 Development 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 Development and to address these concerns as comprehensively as possible.
- To create 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 Development.

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 both the specific aspects of the project as they were encountered as well as community feedback.

2.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation process consisted of a range of different methodologies. These included:

- 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.
- Use of several different channels of communication including face-to-face meetings, email, phone calls, door-knocking and online tools.
- Direct engagement with local political representatives including local councillors, TDs and senators.
- Door-to-door engagement with residents within a 1.5km radius of the Proposed Development.
- 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.
- A Virtual Consultation Room on the project website.
- A Public Information Event

2.1

Engagement with Local Representatives

To ensure the local elected representatives were aware of the project and the benefits it would bring to the community in terms of economic and social benefits from the Community Benefit Fund (as outlined in Chapter 4 of the EIAR), the wider environmental advantages, and how the project aligned with the Government's Climate Action targets, it was important that contact was established early in the consultation process.

Prior to the start of consultation with the wider public, MKO on behalf of AIR informed the elected members of Laois and Kilkenny County Councils representing the Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick and Castlecomer Municipal Districts, in which the proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm is situated, of the plans to develop the wind farm. In advance of the community consultation process, the councilors representing the Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick and Castlecomer Municipal Districts were invited to attend an information evening. This meeting was exclusively for the elected members from the local electoral areas and was to take place in advance of commencing the door-to-door community consultation process. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts the information evening was cancelled.

An introductory letter and project brochure was mailed to each elected representative in September 2024, which was followed up by an email with the introductory letter attached (see Appendix 1). This email also informed elected representatives of the plans to host a Public Information Event in the coming months. It also invited the representatives to contact the project team with any questions they may have or to request a meeting.

2.2

Door-to-Door Engagement

Given the rural nature of the area in question and the relatively low density of houses, it was decided that door-to-door consultation would be merited at every house within a 1.5km radius of the Proposed Wind Farm.

In September 2024, the project CLO commenced the programme of 'door-knocking' in the designated zone. Over the course of three days, **106** homes were visited (map provided in Appendix 4). Where the door was answered, the CLO introduced the project and MKO's involvement. The benefits to the local community as well as the wider environmental benefits and how the Proposed Development aligned to the Government's climate action targets were explained. The CLO also explained the process of ongoing community engagement, the many channels available to the residents to get in touch with the project team, and next steps. Feedback was invited.

Each resident was given a brochure with information on the project, such as the location of the development study area, the estimated project timeline and contact details. Residents were also given a feedback questionnaire (see Appendix 2) and asked to respond with any concerns or questions they may have. The questionnaire asked four questions about the development:

- If the proposed project is developed, what types of benefits should the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm provide to the local community?
- Do you have any concerns about this proposed wind farm and if so, what are they?
- Have you any further comments in relation to the proposed project?
- Seskin Renewable Energy Limited is committed to keeping the local community informed about the proposed project. Please help us identify any other local groups which you feel should be consulted with.

These project brochures and questionnaires were also left at those houses where the door-knock was unanswered. An online version of the questionnaire was also available on the project website and the link to the website was included.

To date, the project team has received correspondence from members of the local community in the form of phone calls from 13 different local residents, email communications from 15 residents, and completed feedback questionnaires from 6 residents.

The reception to the initial door-knock was mixed. Some residents were supportive of the project, while others expressed concerns over the noise of the wind turbines, shadowflicker, property values, the impact the turbines would have on their livestock and bloodstock, and the potential impact on the native wildlife. Several residents requested more detailed information and precise maps of the Proposed Development and were told that these would become available and would be shared as the project developed over the coming months.

A number of local residents were offered a follow up face-to-face meeting with the CLO and AIR representative Neil O'Brien to discuss these concerns. In February, 2024 Neil O'Brien and the CLO met these residents and discussed their concerns with the Proposed Development.

2.3

Wider Community Consultation

Businesses, schools, groups and clubs within a 5km radius of the development received an information pack containing an introductory letter, project brochure and questionnaire during the 'door-knocking' exercise in September 2024. These project brochures contained up-to-date information on the project plans, including:

- An outline description of the project.
- Information about the design team, AIR and MKO.
- The main advantages and benefits of wind energy.
- Details of the planning process and next steps.
- Information about the Community Benefit Fund.
- Contact information.

The CLO met/contacted a number of GAA representatives from clubs in the area. Such GAA clubs included The Harps GAA and Lions AFC in Durrow, Co. Laois and the Lisdowney Hurling Club and Saint Pats Hurling club in Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny. Each representative showed an interest and support for the Proposed Development and requested further clarification on the Community Benefit Fund (See Chapter 4 of this EIAR).

During the information pack drops the CLO met a number of National School principals in the surrounding area. The CLO explained what the Proposed Development entailed and provided information on the Community Benefit Fund. Principals of Lisdowney National School, County Kilkenny, Our Ladys Meadow National School Durrow, Co Laois, Clontubrid National School, Co. Kilkenny and Gathabawn National School, Co. Kilkenny expressed interest in the Proposed Development and further information on the Community Benefit Fund.

2.4

Project Website

A dedicated project website (<https://seskinrenewableswindfarm.com>) was designed and went live in September 2024 on the same day as the Door-to Door Engagement was carried out. The website was constantly 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 development, as well as details about the government's wind energy policies under the Climate Action Plan. The website also contained contact information.

In April 2025, on the day of the Public Information Event, the Virtual Consultation Room went live on the project website. This interactive online space contained the most detailed plans of the project yet, including:

- > Specific locations for the proposed eight 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 the area.
- > Aerial imaging of the site showing the broader location of the wind farm site relative to the area's nearest settlements.
- > A map showing the proposed grid connection route to bring power from the wind farm to the Ballyragget 110kV substation in Co Kilkenny.
- > A map of the proposed Turbine Delivery Route (TDR)
- > Further information on site constraints, 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 six locations surrounding the development site at varying distances and angles.

The information displayed on the project website was the same information presented at the Public Information Event.

3.

PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENT

The Public Information Event (PIE) was organised for Wednesday, April 9th, 2025 (see image taken at PIE in Appendix 4). The venue chosen for the event was the Castle Arms Hotel in Durrow, County Laois, the closest town to the proposed wind farm site. The event was staged between 3pm and 8pm and was attended by representatives of the project team including:

- > Neil O'Brien, AIR
- > Edward Moran, Morland and Property Services Ltd, Director /project CLO
- > Gus McCarthy, MKO Director
- > Eoin McCarthy, MKO Project Director
- > Edward Ryan, MKO Environmental Scientist
- > Natalia Stolarska, MKO Environmental Scientist
- > Evan Connolly, MKO environmental scientist

3.1

Event Advertisement

To bring the PIE to the attention of as many people as possible, newspaper adverts were placed in two of the local newspapers, the *Laois Nationalist* and the *Kilkenny People*, in their respective editions of Tuesday, April 1st and Wednesday, April 2nd, one week out from the event (see Appendix 3).

On Wednesday, April 2nd, eight days out from the event, the CLO performed a door-to-door visit to houses within a 1.5km radius of the development, dropping leaflets of the same advert that had appeared in the local newspapers ensure as many of the residents as possible were made aware of the PIE.

3.2 Event Format

The PIE was staged in a format designed to be open and interactive for the attendees. Boards were erected on either side of the hall displaying posters with information about the development and maps of the proposed site layout. Maps were also displayed showing the turbine delivery and grid connection routes, and aerial imaging of the site with the locations of the turbines clearly marked.

At the far end of the hall a series of photomontages were displayed showing what the Proposed Development would look like from various distances away from the site. Booklets of these photomontages were also laid out for attendees to peruse. Everything on view on the project website was presented at the PIE, and vice versa.

A welcome desk was set up at the entrance to the hall and attendees were invited to sign in with their names and contact details, with the option of signing up to a mailing list also provided.

Attendees were greeted at the sign-in desk and brought through the display by a member of the project team. Attendees were also given the option of perusing the display in their own time. Attendees were also encouraged to ask questions or raise any concerns they may have with members of the project team.

Comment sheets were available for attendees to fill out as they left the event.

Approximately 60 to 80 people attended the Public Information Event over the course of the five hours, with 42 of these electing to leave their names and contact details.

Feelings toward the wind farm varied dramatically amongst the attendees; some members of the local community were roundly 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.

4. FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATION

4.1 Main Issues Raised

Several issues relating to the proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm were raised over the course of the community consultation process, from the initial door-knocking phase through to the Public Information Event and subsequently. Among the most raised issues were:

- > The visual impact of the development.
- > Shadow flicker.
- > The impact on local wildlife
- > The noise generated by the turbines.
- > Payments to near neighbours
- > The Community Benefit Fund
- > The potential traffic disruption from the construction traffic.
- > The potential for damage to local roads during the construction phase.
- > The proximity of the proposed turbines to homes.
- > The impact the development would have on local property prices.

Visual impact / Shadow flicker

The visual impact of the proposed turbines was a major concern for residents living closest to the Site. Several residents expressed their concern about the turbines appearing to “loom over” their homes. Several residents also raised concerns about shadow flicker from the spinning turbine blades affecting their homes.

These concerns were closely tied to the concerns over proximity. Residents were reassured that the turbines are positioned beyond the minimum setback distance specified in the Draft Wind Energy Guidelines (2019)

Residents were also assured that shadow flicker experienced at any property would not exceed the limits set out in the same Draft Guidelines.

Impact on local wildlife

Some local residents raised concerns about the potential impact of both the construction and operation of the Proposed Development would have on the local animal and plant life in the area.

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 in the site over recent years.

Noise concerns

Concerns about turbine noise were closely linked to issues around proximity, particularly among those living nearest to the Proposed Development. Residents were informed 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 any planning conditions set out by the planning authorities regarding the noise from the turbines.

Payments to near neighbours/Community Benefit Fund

At the Public Information Event, some landowners with lands near the Proposed Development site expressed the view that they should receive compensation for the anticipated disruption caused by the construction and operation of the wind farm.

These landowners were informed that, as their lands are not directly involved in the development, they would not be eligible for direct payments. However, they were encouraged to apply to the Community Benefit Fund, which supports local projects and initiatives. The landowners were also assured that access to their lands would be maintained at all times, and that a traffic management plan would be implemented to reduce disruption for local road users.

Impact on local roads

Residents living along the L58333 local road raised concerns over the potential increased traffic flow during the construction phase of the Proposed Development and over the potential damage that may be caused to the road surfaces by the volume of heavy machinery accessing the development.

Residents expressed their views that the L58333 local road in particular is a narrow road which is not designed or equipped to handle a flow of heavy machinery, such as the specialist trucks that will be needed to transport the turbine blades to the site.

In response, the residents were assured that all efforts would be made to minimise disruption during construction. Key activities, such as turbine blade deliveries, would be scheduled during off-peak hours when traffic is at its lowest.

Due care will also be taken to ensure the roads around the development site are respected. In any potential instance in which a road surface is damaged, it will be restored to the same or better condition as soon as possible. In addition, it was explained to residents that roads within the development site itself will need to be considerably improved, and new roads laid, to allow the construction phase to proceed.

Proximity to homes

The proximity of the proposed turbines to homes along the L58333 and surrounding Local Roads in the townland of Archerstown, County Laois was the most significant concern raised by members of the local community over the course of the public consultation process.

During the Public Information Event (PIE), homeowners, farmers, and tenants living or working along these routes voiced strong concerns regarding the closeness of certain turbines to their homes and land.

Residents were informed that one of the key initial criteria in selecting the Seskin site was the separation distance between the wind turbines and residential dwellings. They were reassured that the design of the project complies with the minimum separation distance recommended in the Draft Wind Energy Guidelines (DWEGL, 2019¹), which requires a setback of four times the turbine's tip

In this instance, the full ground to blade tip height of the Seskin turbines is 175 meters and no turbine will be placed less than 700 meters from a home. In this regard, AIR have adhered to the 2019 draft guidelines rather than the advisory guidelines in the current legislation², which advise that turbines should be a minimum of 500m away from a dwelling. The developers have thereby sought to increase the minimum distance between the turbines and the nearest dwellings by nearly 40 percent more than the advisory guidelines.

Impact on property prices

Some members of the local community voiced concerns that the Proposed Wind Farm Development would negatively affect local property values. A number of residents also noted that their children had intended to build homes nearby, and that the development would cause them to reconsider those plans.

In response, residents were informed that peer-reviewed research conducted in the EU and mainland Europe has demonstrated that proximity to a wind farm has no material impact on property prices, and that prices are far more sensitive to the wider influences that dictate the rise and fall of properties values nationwide.

¹ Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2019

² Wind Energy Development Guidelines, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2006

Positive feedback

Notwithstanding the concerns expressed by residents on the above topics, the public consultation process also elicited positive feedback from individuals, households and groups in the local area. The positive feedback in relation to the Proposed Development comprised of support for wind energy and the benefits, both environmental and economic, that the Proposed Development would provide to the local community. There was also enthusiasm among residents regarding the Community Benefit Fund (CBF).

A common theme of the consultation was that the local area should see real, tangible benefits from the Proposed Development. Those residents living closest to the turbine sites will be in receipt of proximity payments through the CBF while the wider community at large will be able to apply for funds through the CBF to support sustainability projects.

The project team informed the community that this fund would be administered by a committee made up of local people and would ideally be comprised of representatives of a broad cross-section of groups and clubs.

5.

CONCLUSION

AIR made meaningful engagement with the local community a primary consideration of the project. Through face-to-face, written, telephone and online contact, the community consultation process has been effective, open and transparent.

AIR has engaged and consulted with the local community from an early stage of the pre-planning phase of the Seskin Renewables 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 Development.

The development of the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm will provide a direct and prolonged economic benefit to the communities surrounding the Proposed Development 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 Seskin Renewables Wind Farm.

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APPENDIX 1

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH
LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES,
September 2024**



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Dear TD/Cllr,

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm Limited is hosting a Public Information Day to unveil details of their proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm project.

A planning application is due to be lodged in the coming months but in advance the developer would like to discuss the project further with you and the local community.

The Government published the Climate Action Plan in 2023, outlining the decision to increase renewable electricity production from wind and solar up to 80 per cent by 2030 and establishing Ireland as a climate neutral economy by 2050.

This plan has set a target of up to 9GW of onshore wind to be supplied to the national grid by 2030. The proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm project is, in part, a response to the challenges of climate change and ensuring a secure supply of Ireland's future energy needs.

You are invited to attend the public information day in the Castle Arms Hotel, Durrow, Co. Laois on the 9th April 2025 from 3pm to 8pm. Members of the project team from MKO Planning and Environmental Consultants and Seskin Renewables Windfarm Limited will be on hand to discuss the specifics of the project and answer questions.

For anyone who cannot attend in person, a Virtual Meeting Room will also be available to view on the project website www.seskinrenewableswindfarm.com and this will detail all the information which will be on display at the Public Information Day. The Virtual Meeting Room will be live on the website from April 9th and until a planning application is lodged.

Kind regards,

Edward Moran, CLO, Seskin Renewables Wind Farm
Email: clo@seskinrenewableswindfarm.com
Phone: 087 479 528

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APPENDIX 2

**FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE
SENT TO LOCAL RESIDENTS AS
PART OF PROJECT
INFORMATION PACK**

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Seskin Renewable Energy Limited
C/O MKO
Tuam Road
Galway
Ireland, H91 VW84

24/09/2024

Feedback Questionnaire – Proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Please use the prepaid envelope to return completed form.

Alternatively, you can complete this questionnaire on the project website www.seskinrenewableswindfarm.com

Q1: If the proposed project is developed, what types of benefits should the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm provide to the local community?

[illegible]

Q2: Do you have any concerns about this proposed wind farm and if so, what are they?

[illegible]

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Seskin Renewable Energy Limited
C/O MKO
Tuam Road
Galway
Ireland, H91 VW84

24/09/2024

Feedback Questionnaire – Proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Please use the prepaid envelope to return completed form.

Alternatively, you can complete this questionnaire on the project website www.seskinrenewableswindfarm.com

Q1: If the proposed project is developed, what types of benefits should the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm provide to the local community?

[illegible]

Q2: Do you have any concerns about this proposed wind farm and if so, what are they?

[illegible]

Q3: Have you any further comments in relation to the proposed project?

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Q4: Seskin Renewable Energy Limited is committed to keeping the local community informed about the proposed project. Please help us identify any other local groups which you feel should be consulted with.

PLEASE COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

Name:

Address:

Email:

Eircode:

RETURN ADDRESS

MKO, Tuam Road, Galway, Ireland, H91 VW84

Email: clo@seskinrenewableswindfarm.com

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APPENDIX 3

**ADVERTISEMENT PLACED IN
LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AHEAD OF
PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENT,
PUBLISHED 01-04-2025**

SESKIN RENEWABLES WIND FARM

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Public Information Day

Atlantic Infrastructure Renewables and Seskin Renewable Energy Limited will host a Public Information Day on Wednesday next, April 9th to provide updates on and answer queries about the proposed Seskin Renewables Wind Farm.

The wind farm is being proposed in the townlands of Ballynaslee, Ballyconra, Seskin, Seskin North and Moatpark in Co. Kilkenny and in the townlands of Archerstown and Tinwear in Co. Laois

Representatives of the developer and environmental consultants will be present to discuss the project with you. All are welcome.

When: Wednesday, April 9th - 3pm to 8pm

Where: The Castle Arms Hotel, Durrow, Co. Laois

See seskinrenewableswindfarm.com for more information
or contact clo@seskinrenewableswindfarm.com
or phone **087-479 5281**.

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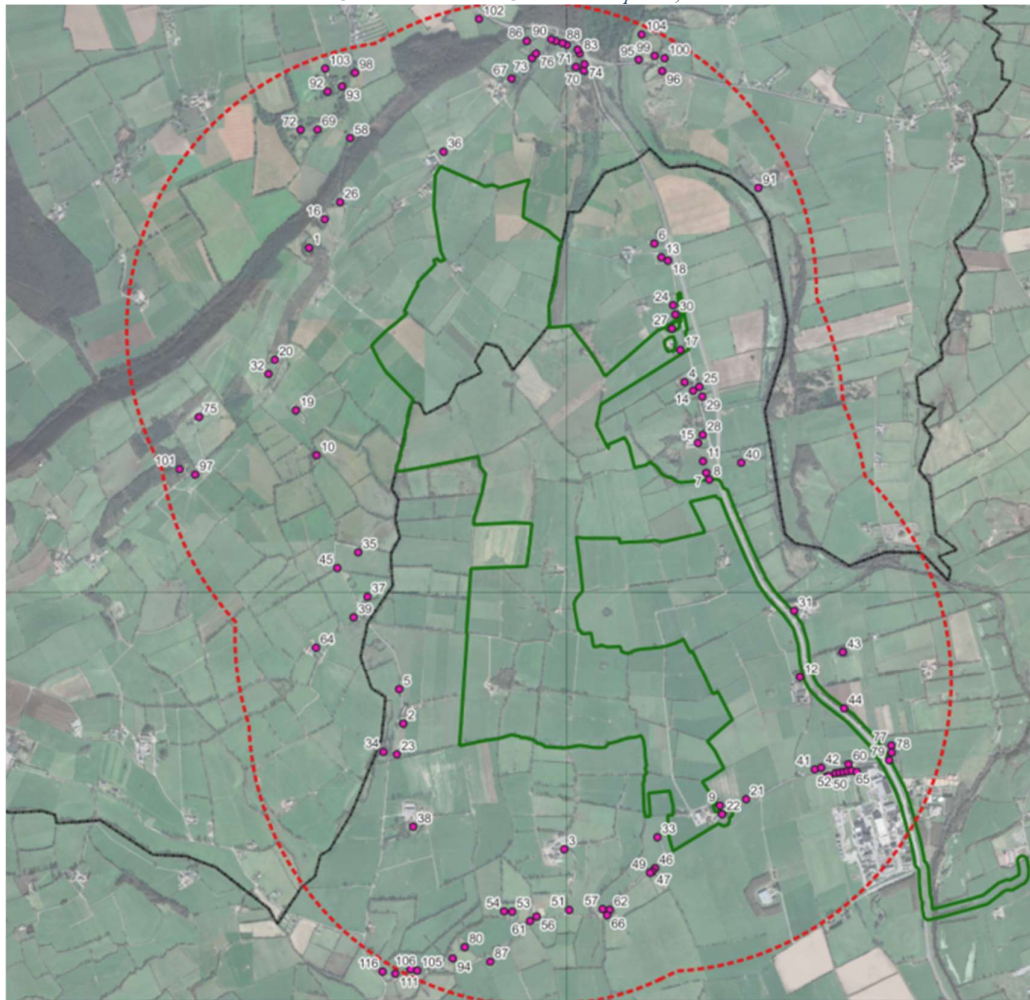


APPENDIX 4

**PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENT
AND MAP OF DOOR-TO-DOOR
ENGAGEMENT**



(Pictured from Left to Right) Edward Moran (CLO), MKO's Natalia Stolarska and Evan Connolly, Neil O'Brien (AIR) and MKO's Eoin McCarthy pictured at the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm Public Information Event, held in the Castle Arms Hotel in Co Laois on April 9th, 2025.



The map of the Seskin Renewables Wind Farm site area used during the door-knocking phase of public consultation. Identified are the eight proposed turbine sites and the occupied dwellings within 1.5km of the site boundary.