

Submission made by

Elaine Daltan – Chairperson Sunyata Board of Trustees

On Behalf of Sunyata Board of Trustees

Sunyata Buddhist Centre

Snaty

Sixmilebridge

Co. Clare

Reference number: ABP-319215-24

Applicant: FuturEnergy Knockshanvo Designated Activity Company

Address of the proposed development: Snaty (Massy), Hurdleston, Oatfield, Drumsillagh or Sallybank (Parker), Gortacullin, Aharinaghbeg, Knockshanvo, Cloontra, Cloghoolia, Ballycullen, Cloontra West, Formoyle More, Kilmore, Mountrice, Ballyvorgal South, Crag, Kyleglass, Glenwood, Snaty (Cooper), Ballykelly, Muingboy, Drumsillagh or Sallybank (Merritt), Kyle, Belvoir, Snaty (Wilson) and Cloontra East, Co Clare and in the townland of Court, Co. Limerick.

Nature of the proposed development: Development of a wind farm.

To whom it may concern

As representatives of Sunyata Buddhist Centre, we respectfully implore the planning committee to give careful consideration to each of the concerns and points raised in this submission. Sunyata holds a unique and irreplaceable position, not just within our local community but across the entire country and even globally. It is the only centre of its kind in Ireland, attracting individuals from both national and international backgrounds who are drawn to engage with Buddhism, meditation, and mindfulness.

In presenting our case, we aim to emphasise the established development trajectory of the area surrounding Sunyata, one that prioritises natural seclusion, preservation, tranquillity, and the fostering of spiritual and mental well-being. This crucial aspect has been conspicuously overlooked in Knockshanvo's application, raising serious concerns about the complete disregard for our centre and the vital role that Sunyata and the surrounding area play in spiritual and societal well-being.

We respectfully request that An Bord Pleanála give thoughtful consideration to each point we raise. The decision on this application carries far-reaching and irreversible consequences that could significantly harm the fabric of our community and compromise Sunyata's space therein. We trust that An Bord Pleanála will give this submission the weight and attention it deserves.

About Sunyata

Sunyata Buddhist Centre was established in 1998, based on a 10-acre property run by a board of trustees and a dedicated community of volunteers. The centre's running costs come entirely from public donations, and it is also a registered charity (No: 20205822). Since its founding, Sunyata has been offering frequent residential retreats and a wide variety of other events to those who wish to learn about Buddhism, mindfulness, and meditation. It also welcomes guests to come and stay at any time throughout the year to sample spiritual community life or simply take refuge from life's difficulties. Since opening, there have been over 350 residential retreats and weekend workshops at Sunyata, with more than 6,000 attendees, along with thousands of day and overnight visitors each year.

Our offerings include monthly women's day retreats, beginner's meditation workshops, children's creative mindfulness workshops, community work days, and the annual Family Camp. We regularly host Buddhist monks and nuns, both to teach retreats and to stay during other times, and we plan, in the near future, to have monastics permanently onsite. In fact, Sunyata is currently under consideration to become the first Theravadan Buddhist Monastery in the country, with Buddhist monastics living permanently at the centre. This significant development would allow for deeper engagement with Buddhist teachings and provide a long-term spiritual home for the monastic community in Ireland.

This has all been made possible through years of hard work by volunteers and the support of our community throughout Ireland, ensuring the development and preservation of this unique site. At a time of global youth mental health crisis, spaces like Sunyata, which provide an irreplaceable and accessible service to people seeking refuge, sanctuary, and peace, must be considered vital resources. They must be protected from the impact of industrial development, such as the proposed wind turbines at Knockshanvo.



The Importance of this Location

When Sunyata Buddhist Centre was established in Snaty in 1998, the location was specifically chosen for its remoteness from urban centres and industrial developments, and its seclusion in nature. The area's landscape and road infrastructure contributed to the

reasonable expectation that this site would remain free from large-scale constructions. As discussed below, this principle is central to the selection of locations for places of religious worship in Buddhism, particularly for silent retreat centres, and is essential for fostering meditation and mindfulness.

Over the past 25 years, Sunyata has not only preserved but further developed this unique area, becoming known both nationally and internationally as a sanctuary for those seeking spiritual insight, solace from life's difficulties, and a deeper connection with nature. Thousands of people have established profound relationships with this beautiful space of seclusion, finding a refuge. Sunyata's reputation has grown far beyond the local community, drawing individuals from all over the country and beyond, who have benefited from the tranquillity and spiritual depth that this setting offers.

Sunyata is not opposed to appropriate community development or planning applications that align with the character and direction of the surrounding area. However, it is our contention that FuturEnergy has failed to adequately consider the impact of their proposed construction on Sunyata's operations. They have overlooked how their development does not fit within the established progression of the area over the past three decades. Moreover, their submission reveals a surprising lack of understanding, substantive consultation and due diligence in researching the unique nature of the area where they intend to build this significant project.

Sunyata plays a crucial role in the overall development trajectory of the 12 O'Clock Hills, which has focused on creating a space for people to experience the profound benefits of nature immersion, free from the visual and auditory intrusion of industrial objects. This intentional choice to remain secluded from such developments underscores the area's dedication to mental and physical well-being, tranquillity, and spiritual cultivation.

The proposed construction of a large-scale wind farm by FuturEnergy represents a stark break from this established path, threatening the visual and acoustic serenity that has been so carefully maintained. Notably, Sunyata is the only Buddhist centre of its kind in the country, with its location chosen precisely for its isolation from industrial elements. This silence and seclusion are not just incidental but central to its spiritual purpose and beliefs. The community is deeply distraught at the prospect that the character of this special place will be altered forever. Spaces that foster mental health and well-being, particularly those designed for meditation and mindfulness, are invaluable in society. The scientifically demonstrated benefits of meditation, supported by natural seclusion, highlight how the proposed development would cause disproportionate harm to both the local community and the wider societal good, far outweighing any potential strategic benefits.



Dhamma Hall (Place of worship) Front and side facing development



The Importance of the Site To Buddhist Principles

The proposed wind farm near Sunyata Buddhist Centre poses a significant threat to the core spiritual and environmental characteristics that define Buddhist practice. Natural spaces for quiet contemplation are not merely desirable in Buddhism—they are essential. These principles are deeply rooted in the Buddha's own life and teachings, as well as in the Thai Forest Tradition, which Sunyata follows. The proposed development threatens to disrupt a sanctuary that has been nurtured over the past 25 years to foster spiritual growth and mental well-being, impacting both local and international communities who rely on its tranquillity.

The Importance of Natural Seclusion in Buddhism

The importance of natural environments in Buddhist practice originates from the life of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became the Buddha. Before his enlightenment, he sought seclusion in nature, leaving behind the distractions of royal life to meditate in the forests of India. It was under the Bodhi tree in a serene natural setting that he attained enlightenment, establishing the foundation for Buddhist meditation and mindfulness practices [1]. The connection between nature and spiritual awakening is foundational to Buddhism and has been reflected throughout its history.

Sunyata Buddhist Centre follows the Thai Forest Tradition, a branch of Theravada Buddhism that emphasises meditation in natural, often secluded, forest settings. This tradition began in Thailand in the 19th century as a response to the need for practitioners to return to the ascetic practices of early Buddhism. Forest monks seek solitude to meditate deeply, away from the distractions and noise of urban life [2].

The tradition holds that nature provides an ideal environment for spiritual cultivation. The silence and natural beauty of the woods are not incidental but central to achieving mindfulness and insight. Forest monks, as well as lay practitioners, retreat into these environments to foster deeper spiritual development. The significance of natural seclusion is thus integral to the practices of the Thai Forest Tradition, and its benefits have been embraced globally [3].

The Impact of Wind Farms on Contemplative Spaces

Large scale industrial objects such as wind turbines pose a direct threat to the quiet and visual serenity essential for meditative practice in the Buddhist Tradition. Research shows that wind turbine noise can have a detrimental effect on health and well-being, particularly when introduced into previously quiet environments [4]. Industrial noise disrupts the silence necessary for mindfulness, concentration, and insight. Moreover, the visual impact of towering wind turbines in the background of natural landscapes can significantly detract from the aesthetic and psychological benefits provided by those spaces [5].

For those who come to Sunyata to immerse themselves in nature, the presence of wind turbines would irrevocably alter the environment. Imagine people from all over Ireland and beyond, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, seeking peace and solace by spending time in the woods, visiting the streams and waterfalls, listening to birds, and engaging in quiet contemplation in the woodland log cabin. The sight and sound of wind turbines would disrupt this experience, introducing mechanical noise and visual intrusion into what is meant to be a sacred space for quiet reflection.

The Ethical Dimension: Protecting Sacred Spaces

Buddhist ethics place significant emphasis on protecting natural environments, especially those that serve as refuges for spiritual practice. The Buddha himself instructed that forests and natural spaces should be preserved as places for meditation and mindfulness [6]. Modern Buddhist communities continue this tradition, advocating for the protection of these environments from industrial development and urban encroachment.

The proposed wind farm represents a dramatic shift in the landscape that threatens not only the spiritual practices at Sunyata but also the broader principle of preserving natural spaces for the benefit of mental and spiritual well-being. For over 9,000 Buddhists in Ireland,

Sunyata provides an irreplaceable environment for contemplation, reflection, and spiritual growth [7]. As the only centre in Ireland aligned with the Thai Forest Tradition, it plays a critical role in supporting the religious and cultural practices of both Irish Buddhists and those of Thai and Sri Lankan descent.

Sunyata's Demonstrated Role in the Community and the Role of Spaces for Contemplation in Society

Sunyata contributes significantly to the mental health of both individuals and the broader community by offering a variety of mindfulness, meditation, and spiritual practices rooted in Buddhist teachings. These programs, open to individuals of all backgrounds, aim to reduce stress, foster emotional resilience, and promote mental clarity.

1. Mindfulness and Meditation Practice

Mindfulness and meditation are central to Sunyata's approach to mental well-being. Research has shown that mindfulness practices effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and depression in both clinical and non-clinical populations [1,2]. Sunyata offers regular Mindfulness for Beginners workshops, teaching participants how to become more aware of their thoughts and feelings. This awareness enables them to manage emotions more effectively, stay grounded in the present moment, and foster a sense of inner calm.

Sunyata's offerings also include breath awareness and loving-kindness (metta) meditation, techniques designed to cultivate emotional balance. These practices are especially beneficial for managing overwhelming emotions, reducing stress, and fostering a sense of compassion for oneself and others.

2. Promoting Emotional Resilience

Sunyata provides an opportunity for deep rest and mental clarity through its silent meditation retreats. These retreats allow participants to step away from their usual routines and digital distractions, fostering emotional resilience and creating space for self-reflection. Insight meditation (Vipassana) encourages self-awareness and acceptance of difficult emotions, helping individuals manage stress and anxiety with greater ease. Through these practices, participants develop a deeper understanding of their emotions, leading to long-term improvements in mental health.

3. Creating a Supportive Community

Sunyata fosters a non-judgmental, supportive environment where individuals can share their experiences and connect with others. This sense of belonging helps alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are often linked to poor mental health. Group meditation and community events, such as Family Camp and Community Days, further strengthen this supportive network, promoting healing and emotional well-being in a community-focused atmosphere.

4. Teaching Compassion and Loving-Kindness (Metta)

Sunyata teaches loving-kindness meditation (Metta), a practice designed to cultivate compassion towards oneself and others. This meditation is particularly beneficial for individuals struggling with self-criticism, low self-esteem, or feelings of anger. By encouraging forgiveness and empathy, Metta meditation helps promote emotional healing. Regular practice reduces self-judgment and fosters a positive mental outlook, improving participants' overall well-being.

5. Tools for Stress Reduction

Mindfulness-based techniques, such as mindful walking, mindful eating, and breathwork, are integrated into Sunyata's daily activities. These practices help individuals manage stress effectively and apply mindfulness to everyday tasks, promoting a greater sense of peace and well-being. Sunyata also offers Creative Mindfulness for Kids, introducing young children to mindfulness practices that help them develop emotional awareness and stress management skills from an early age.

The Threat to Sunyata's Vital Role in the Community

The construction of the proposed wind farm threatens to disrupt Sunyata's peaceful environment, which is essential for its ability to promote mental health and well-being. The noise and visual disturbances from large wind turbines would erode the tranquillity required for effective meditation and mindfulness practices. This disruption could diminish the impact of Sunyata's retreats and workshops, ultimately jeopardizing the centre's role as a vital resource for mental and spiritual health.

Sunyata's contribution to mental health aligns with the HSE's Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027, which emphasizes the importance of supporting community-based initiatives outside the formal health sector. The plan recognizes the critical role that such non-clinical settings play in fostering mental well-being. Sunyata's mindfulness-based programs are designed to empower individuals to manage their mental health and prevent the escalation of issues like stress, anxiety, and depression [3,4]. Protecting Sunyata from industrial development is, therefore, not only about preserving a spiritual retreat but also about safeguarding a crucial community asset that contributes to public health.

Sunyata and the HSE's Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027

Sunyata's work aligns directly with the HSE's plan, which highlights the importance of community initiatives in promoting mental health. By offering accessible mindfulness and meditation programs, Sunyata helps individuals take control of their mental health, providing a non-clinical, preventive approach to well-being. The dana (generosity) model ensures that these programs are available to everyone, regardless of financial status, making Sunyata a vital resource for mental health across diverse communities.

The proposed wind farm development, however, threatens to undermine Sunyata's ability to offer these services. The noise and visual impact of turbines would compromise the peaceful environment that is integral to the centre's effectiveness in promoting mental well-being. Without the necessary tranquillity, Sunyata's ability to function as a sanctuary for healing and spiritual growth could be severely diminished.

Sunyata Buddhist Centre has become an essential part of the community, serving as a retreat centre for mindfulness and meditation for people from all walks of life, both locally and internationally. The peaceful environment that allows for these practices is under significant threat from the potential disruption caused by the construction of the Knockshanvo Wind Farm. Industrial noise and visual disturbances could severely undermine Sunyata's ability to offer its invaluable services, which support mental and spiritual health.

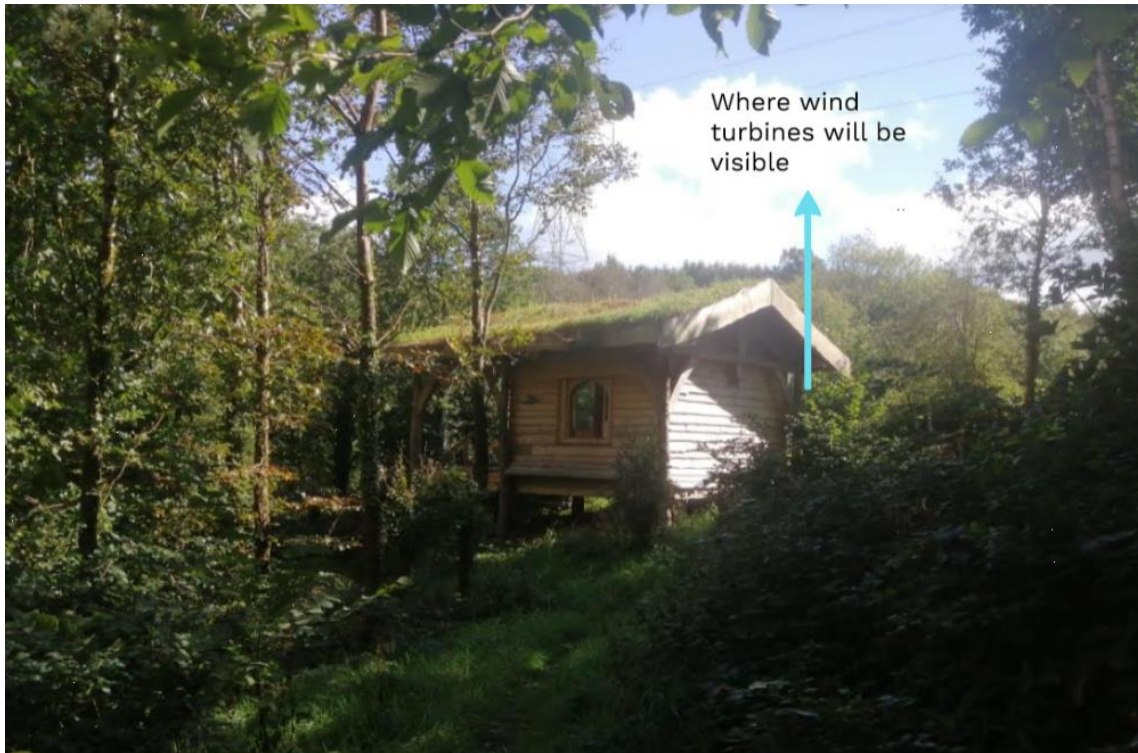
The planning submission for the wind farm fails to recognize the critical role that Sunyata plays in promoting mental health, fostering community connection, and providing a space for spiritual reflection. Given its importance to the community and its alignment with the HSE's mental health strategy, protecting Sunyata from industrial encroachment is of utmost importance. By safeguarding this serene environment, Sunyata can continue to serve as a vital sanctuary for those seeking mindfulness, peace, and emotional healing.



Family Camp participants on the annual walk to the top of the 12 O'Clock Hills. A landscape that will now be dominated by the proposed development



Sunyata's Dhamma Hall which hosts silent retreats and is open year round as a space of quiet contemplation



A cabin in Sunyata's woodland for quiet contemplation and nature immersion which will be one of the closest places to the proposed development

Response To Knockshavo Planning Application

The planning documents, in general make scant reference to the impact on Sunyata but where they do incorrectly refer to this important spiritual centre as either a 'tourist attraction' or 'amenity'. In Chapter 5 on *Population and Human Health*, passing reference to Sunyata as one of several "amenities and community facilities" located near the proposed wind farm (Chapter 5.3.6.3). This classification places Sunyata alongside GAA sports clubs, youth clubs, and recreational areas located much further away in Broadford, Kilkishen, and Sixmilebridge. Such a categorisation fundamentally misrepresents the centre's purpose and its contribution not only to the Buddhist community but to wider society. Sunyata is not a recreational facility or a general amenity that may be in use a few times a week—it is a unique, one-of-a-kind Buddhist retreat centre in Ireland, open throughout the year to guests seeking solace, offering residential retreats and events dedicated to spiritual growth, mindfulness, and meditation. The failure to differentiate Sunyata from general community amenities in terms of the effects of this development is a serious mischaracterisation that undervalues its importance. Moreover, it ignores the specialised environment it requires to function and neglects to fully address the impact of this development.

Crucially, the centre's role as a place dedicated to mental and spiritual well-being should have been prominently featured in the section of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) on *Population and Human Health*. This section assesses

other community facilities and their importance to local health, but it does not give Sunyata the same consideration, despite its significant contributions in this area. Sunyata provides a space for individuals seeking spiritual enrichment, emotional support, and personal growth. Its role in supporting mental health through mindfulness and meditation is particularly vital in a time where such practices are increasingly recognised for their therapeutic benefits. The failure to include Sunyata's role in this section is not just an oversight but a fundamental misunderstanding of its contribution to human health and well-being, particularly as it attracts people nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, the planning documents note Sunyata's proximity to the wind farm—approximately 891 metres from the nearest turbine (T02)—and acknowledge potential impacts such as shadow flicker, estimating a daily effect of 1 hour and 18 minutes caused by two turbines (Table 5-9, *Shadow Flicker Results*). While the mitigation strategy proposed addresses shadow flicker, noting that the daily impact exceeds thresholds, the mitigation approach is vague, without sufficient detail on how it would be monitored and entirely inadequate for a facility like Sunyata. A retreat centre where meditation and mindfulness practices rely on an atmosphere of stillness cannot be treated the same as residential or recreational spaces. Visual disturbances like shadow flicker would severely detract from Sunyata's capacity to maintain the peaceful, undisturbed environment essential to its operation. The failure to appreciate the impact of shadow flicker on Sunyata's unique setting demonstrates that the proposed mitigations do not take into account the specific needs of such a centre.

The inclusion of noise and vibration assessments (Chapter 12) further highlights this lack of proper consultation. While the documents consider the impact on local homes and schools, they fail to address the fact that Sunyata is a place where silent retreats are held. These retreats require an environment free from external noise, and any disturbance would severely undermine the centre's purpose. Noise pollution from the wind farm is inevitable, especially during certain weather conditions, and mitigation measures that may be acceptable for homes are entirely inadequate for a retreat centre where silence is integral. Despite its proximity to the development site, the planning documents show no evidence that Sunyata's management was consulted, nor do they acknowledge the specific operational needs of the centre. This lack of consultation is a critical failure, as it shows a poor understanding of Sunyata's contribution and the environmental conditions it requires.

The *Community Engagement Report* (Appendix 2-4) outlines the engagement efforts with stakeholders within a 2km radius, but Sunyata's classification as an "amenity centre" suggests that it was not given the same attention as residential dwellings. The report notes that 74.68% of visited properties were occupied dwellings, with engagement through visits by community liaison officers. However, it remains unclear whether Sunyata, as an active retreat centre, was properly engaged. This misclassification not only results in inadequate consultation but also suggests a broader failure to recognise Sunyata's significance as a retreat centre that serves not just the local population but individuals across Ireland and internationally. Sunyata's

role in promoting mental health and well-being far exceeds that of a typical “amenity centre,” and the lack of direct consultation further highlights the planning process’s shortcomings.

Under planning law, developments that could significantly impact community facilities are required to take into account the specific characteristics and needs of those facilities. In the case of Sunyata, this has not been done. The mitigation measures proposed—such as upgraded roads and picnic areas—are entirely inappropriate for a spiritual retreat centre. These are measures that might serve tourists or casual recreational users, but they fail to protect or enhance the meditative and spiritual atmosphere that Sunyata relies upon. Treating Sunyata as though it were a general community facility, comparable to a sports club, reveals a deep misunderstanding of its role, leading to insufficient engagement and a disregard for the centre’s contribution to the community’s mental and spiritual well-being.

The way Sunyata has been treated as an afterthought throughout these planning documents is unacceptable. The lack of meaningful consultation, combined with the inappropriate and inadequate mitigations proposed, indicates a disregard for Sunyata’s importance. This development has the potential to cause serious harm to the centre—not just in terms of minor disruption but in ways that strike at the core of its purpose. Planning law requires that such impacts be fully considered and mitigated, yet the proposed development has failed to meet this standard.

The planning committee must recognise Sunyata not as a general amenity but as a unique and vital resource for the Buddhist community in Ireland. The mitigation measures suggested in the documents do not address the centre’s needs, and the lack of proper consultation reveals a significant oversight. We request that these deficiencies be addressed, and that the planning committee ensures that Sunyata is adequately protected from the irreversible harm posed by this wind farm project.

In reviewing the Knockshanvo Windfarm planning documents, the mentions of Sunyata Buddhist Centre reflect a troubling pattern of misclassification, lack of adequate consultation, and disregard for the centre’s unique role and needs. The inadequate treatment of Sunyata within these documents, highlights both legal and planning oversights, including Sunyata’s misclassification, the failure to consult meaningfully, insufficient mitigation proposals, and a broader disregard for Sunyata’s contribution to the community and beyond.

Lack of proper recognition of the role of Sunyata in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)

On page 513 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report Sunyata is mentioned:

“The Sunyata Buddhist Centre is located approximately 90m from the northwestern boundary of the proposed Wind Farm Site. The retreat centre offers residential retreats and a wide variety of other events to those who wish to learn about Buddhism, mindfulness and meditation”

However in the section containing evidence around health, no acknowledgement of the health benefits provided to the community, nationally and internationally and the negative impact that the proposed development along with the cumulative impact of the six proposed windfarms with 66 turbines in close proximity would have on the ability of Sunyata to provide sanctuary.

The evidence that was provided in Chapter 5 on health impacts of the EIAR has referred to a study called *“Green on Green: Public Perceptions of Wind Power in Scotland and Ireland”*. The EIAR relied on this report to posit that people who live near windfarms are happy with windfarms. However, the windfarms examined in this study and in all of the other studies were not of the same size as the windfarms proposed in the Knockshanvo windfarm. In fact the study titled *“Green on Green: Public Perceptions of Wind Power in Scotland and Ireland”* referred to wind turbines only one third the height of the proposed turbines at Knockshanvo. Therefore the findings from these studies do not generalise to the wellbeing of the population around Knockshanvo and surrounding areas.

The EIAR in Section 5.7 states *“The closest occupied dwelling is located 751 metres (H492) from a proposed turbine location (T06)”*. Again this fails to recognise that Sunyata is itself a residential building. Some of the volunteers at Sunyata live there all year round and it is their residence. This demonstrates a lack of proper environmental impact assessment.

While the EIAR recognised Sunyata in its baseline assessment, it failed to adequately characterise the impacts the proposed development would have on Sunyata’s operations as a sanctuary for meditation, wellbeing and spiritual development.

Lack of proper consultation

The following is a screenshot taken from the website of the proposed Knockshanvo windfarm development on 20/20/2024 (www.knockshanvowindfarm.ie):



Summer 2024	Winter 2023	Autumn 2023	Summer 2023
> Planning application submitted to An Bord Pleanála by FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC on August 31, 2024, for Knockshanvo Wind Farm. Planning application available to view at www.knockshanvoplaning.ie > Planning application submitted to An Bord Pleanála by FuturEnergy Knockshanvo DAC on August 31, 2024, for the grid connection route from the proposed Knockshanvo Wind Farm. Planning application available to view	> Local community engagement clinics, Wednesday November 22, 12pm–8pm, and Thursday November 23, 10am–4pm, Castle Oaks House Hotel, Castleconnell, V94 EH94 > Targeted planning application submission date: Q2 2024 > The full application will be publicly available on a dedicated planning website	> Information webinar held on Wednesday October 11. Presentation slides available in Project Updates > Installation of a temporary 80 metre meteorological mast. Location details in Project Updates > Turbine coordinates published > Detailed project brochure. Delivered locally and also available to download in Project Updates > A virtual exhibition with updated project information	> Newsletter 3, with progress updates and information on the Community Benefit Fund > Detailed site investigations commence > Archaeology & cultural heritage site assessment > Landscape and Visual Assessments begin > Telecoms & Aviation assessment

We question why the applicant held their “consultation” evening in Castleconnell Co. Limerick instead of the neighbourhoods most likely to be impacted by the proposed development, for example Broadford or Sixmilebridge?

We contend that there was no consultation, only communication. Consultation is where communities can be heard and for their concerns to be taken into account. The concerns of the local community have not adequately been heard or taken into account in the application for Knockshanvo Windfarm. This contravenes the Aarhus convention.

Natura Impact Statement lack of appropriate assessment and provision of mitigation measures necessary to avoid, reduce or offset negative effects of the proposed development

Effect of cumulative impact of proposed nearby windfarms not assessed in Natura Impact Statement

There are five other proposed windfarms applying for planning permission within close enough proximity to warrant a cumulative impact assessment. These are Carrownagowan, Fahybeg, Lackereagh, Oatfield and Ballycar.

- Carrownagowan Windfarm near Bodyke; 19 planned turbines, An Bord Pleanála Case reference: PA03.308799. Proceedings are now with the Supreme Court. A separate application for the GRID connection in Ardnacrusha is with the Board; An Bord Pleanála Case reference: ABP-318505. Developer: FuturEnergy.
- Fahybeg Windfarm near Bridgetown; 8 planned turbines; An Bord Pleanála Case reference: PL03.317227. Rejected by Clare County Council previously, appealed with An Bord Pleanála, and unbelievably granted planning permission in early March 2024. Legal proceedings (judicial review) in the High Court on-going. Developer: RWE.
- Lackareagh Windfarm near Kilbane; 7 planned turbines; Application for planning launched with Clare County Council in August 2024. A planned mast to gather (wind) data was given planning permission by Clare County Council; this is being appealed with An Bord Pleanála Case reference: ABP-318846. EDF now applied for planning permission with Clare County Council in August 2024 under 2460411. Developer EDF
- Oatfield Windfarm neighbouring the Knockshanvo Windfarm; 11 planned turbines; Currently with An Bord Pleanála, Case reference: PC03.315239 (SID) and 318782 (planning application). Developer Orsted.
- Ballycar Windfarm currently with An Bord Pleanála, case number PA03.318943,

According to the Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment for impact of any proposed development

https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2009_AA_Guidance.pdf page 27, the development should take into account in its Natura Impact Statement (NIS):

“ whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives”.

In Case C-142/07 Ecologistas en Acción-CODA v Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2008), the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) held that by splitting most of the the project into sections that were less than 5 km apart(the threshold above which national legislation required EIA), there was a failure to consider cumulative and indirect impacts of the project.

The judgement in this case stated *‘The objective of the EIA Directive cannot be circumvented by the splitting of projects. Where several projects, taken together, may have significant effects on the environment within the meaning of Article 2(1), their environmental impact should be assessed as a whole. It is necessary to consider projects jointly in particular where they are connected, follow on from one another, or their environmental effects overlap. The whole project needs to be described.*

Therefore the Knockshanvo Windfarm NIS and EIAR do not fulfill the legal requirements for the Habitats Directive because it fails to consider the cumulative impacts of other nearby similar proposed windfarm developments on the relevant habitats and environmental impacts in the area. Focusing on Knockshanvo alone amounts to project splitting.

In Section 8 of the NIS, the NIS mentions cumulative impacts but reference to the previous chapters, for example with reference to bats and otters, shows that studies relate only to Knockshanvo and not the other proposed windfarm developments in the local area.

We argue that as well as a lack of a cumulative impact assessment, the Knockshanvo NIS fails to adequately consider or provide for the impact of the proposed development on certain species of interest that are impacted by the development including hen harriers, white-tailed eagle, the red-listed curlew, plover, blackheaded gull, cormorants aquatic animals and other species relevant to the lower shannon SAC.

We also argue that the NIS does not adequately provide mitigation measures necessary to avoid, reduce or offset negative effects of the Knockshanvo development. If there are measures put in place in Knockshanvo to mitigate against the impact of the development on protected species, habitats and water, those measures proposed are simply not enough, especially when large swathes of the area will be covered in other wind turbines.

An example includes the admission of impacts on otter contained in the NIS page 116:

“The Proposed Development also has the potential to result in indirect effects on otter habitat in the form of water pollution resulting from construction activity as described above. Specific mitigation with regard to prevent of impacts to otter as a result of water quality deterioration and impacts on prey species is provided in Section 6.2.2.2 above”

However, Section 6.2.2.2 does not contain information about mitigating against impacts on prey species and the proposed mitigation measures appear to kick in only if the water quality is detected to have deteriorated. At this stage it would be too late. In addition, the proposed development, mitigation measures and the NIS does not pay adequate attention to the stipulations contained within the Water Framework Directive. The NIS admits in several places that the proposed development will result in water quality deterioration and does not provide sufficient evidence that it would mitigate successfully against this. The proposed development would indubitably lead to increase water pollution in the local area.

Impacts to peat bogs

The NIS does not adequately address the impact of the proposed development on peat bogs in the area. It acknowledges the fact that it would disturb the peat bogs in Section 3.2.8 page 32 of the NIS. It says peat “will be excavated from infrastructure locations such as turbine bases, hardstands, borrow pits and roads, will be handled and placed/reinstated onsite.”

We argue that peatland bog needs to be protected according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report 2022 and that the proposal to excavate and move the peat is detrimental to the unique habitat it provides. Some of the bog on the 12 O’Clock Hills is considered National Heritage.

Rock blasting and borrow pits

The NIS does not adequately assess the impact of the proposed rock blasting and creation of borrow pits on the Sunyata silent community, nor on the local wildlife. The proposed extraction of rock from the 12 O’Clock Hills is bound to interfere with local walkers on the 12 O’Clock Hills trail and will damage this historic and locally loved hill.



Exploration of Legal Oversights in Knockshanvo Planning Documents

While the report addresses the impact on residential properties in Section 6.2, it fails to adequately consider spaces like Sunyata, which require silence and tranquillity to function. The turbines' noise, particularly low-frequency noise, has not been fully addressed, and its impact on a centre dedicated to silent meditation could be devastating. The EIAR fails to recognise Sunyata as a non-residential sensitive receptor, overlooking the need to maintain an environment free from noise disruptions that would otherwise undermine its operations.

Noise Impact and Inadequate Assessment

Noise is a critical concern for Sunyata, where silence is not just a preference but an operational necessity. The turbines, ranging from 179.5m to 185m in height, will generate significant noise, especially under certain weather conditions. While the report considers nearby residences, it does not account for the specific needs of Sunyata, where silence is crucial. The cumulative noise impact, particularly at night or during retreats, would be far more disruptive for Sunyata than for standard homes.

The predicted nighttime noise levels of 34.9 dB LA90 at wind speeds of 10 m/s (Reference: 217501.0248NT07) may meet general guidelines, but they do not account for the heightened sensitivity of a retreat centre. Recent rulings from the High Court (Courts News Ireland, Decisis) have confirmed that wind farm noise can be deemed a nuisance, even when technically compliant, particularly in sensitive environments like Sunyata's.

The predicted daytime noise levels (Table 3, Reference: 217501.0248NT07) show that noise could rise to 37.9 dB LA90, which, while technically within limits, would still disrupt meditation and reflection at Sunyata. The impact of such noise on Sunyata would be far more severe than on residential properties, where the need for silence is not as critical. A more detailed, site-specific noise study is essential to fully understand the impact on Sunyata's operations.

Legal Framework and Further Considerations

The project also fails to meet legal standards set by the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (2011/92/EU, as amended by 2014/52/EU), which requires thorough assessments of projects likely to have significant environmental impacts. The failure to properly assess cumulative noise impacts on sensitive receptors like Sunyata violates this directive. The Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) limit turbine noise to background levels plus 5 dB(A) in low-noise environments. The noise levels predicted for Sunyata risk exceeding these limits when cumulative background noise is considered, breaching the guidelines. Furthermore, the consultation process falls short of the requirements outlined in the Aarhus Convention, which mandates public participation in environmental decision-making. Sunyata, as a key stakeholder, was not adequately consulted regarding noise impacts, which is a serious procedural failing.

The project also fails to adequately explore reasonable alternatives, a requirement under the EIA Directive. Reasonable alternatives, such as reconfiguring the location of the turbines or reducing their height to minimise impact, should have been considered but are not explored in sufficient detail. This is particularly relevant when considering the broader precautionary principle enshrined in EU environmental law, which requires the minimisation of risks to sensitive environments like Sunyata.

Misclassification of Sunyata Buddhist Centre

The EIAR incorrectly classifies Sunyata as a tourist attraction (Section 6.2 - *Residential Amenity and Tourism*), which grossly misrepresents its purpose as a silent retreat centre. Visitors to Sunyata are not casual tourists; they are individuals seeking spiritual growth and mental well-being. Misclassifying Sunyata leads to inappropriate planning considerations and ignores its role as the only Theravadan Buddhist residential retreat centre in Ireland.

Impact of Construction Phase and Inadequacy of Mitigation Measures

The mitigation measures in *Ch 18 Schedule of Mitigation* (Section 18.6, Table 18.6-1, PDF page 17) are insufficient for a retreat centre that depends on peace and quiet. The report's vague monitoring plan, which promises corrective action in the event of a noise exceedance, lacks clarity on how noise will be monitored, who will be responsible, and how quickly action will be taken. Such ambiguity weakens the mitigation strategy and fails to address Sunyata's specific needs. The construction phase, in particular, could cause significant disruption to the centre, with no clear protections in place. The types and hours of interruptions mentioned in the mitigation measures reflect a focus on residential areas, failing to recognise that a retreat centre like Sunyata operates according to different rhythms and requires constant peace and quiet throughout the day, not just at designated "residential quiet hours."

Moreover, the reliance on post-construction monitoring to address potential noise exceedances does not offer sufficient assurance. The monitoring process is ambiguously described, leaving questions about how consistently and effectively noise levels will be tracked. The plan fails to account for the centre's need for more immediate and reliable noise control, given its sensitivity to disturbances that might be deemed tolerable in residential contexts but highly disruptive in a retreat environment. Without clear and robust safeguards, the centre faces a risk of prolonged disruption before any corrective action is taken.

The visual impact of the turbines, alongside the shadow flicker already discussed, also lacks adequate mitigation. As a place of meditation, Sunyata's environment is inherently tied to its natural setting. The introduction of towering industrial structures will compromise the aesthetic tranquillity that is essential to the centre's atmosphere. This aspect has been downplayed in the planning documents, where the primary focus is on general visual impacts in residential and recreational areas, rather than the specific visual sensitivity of a retreat centre dedicated to mindfulness and introspection.

Conclusion

While in this observation we have done our best to capture the heart and soul of what Sunyata is to so many, the truth is that we could never convey that adequately. We hope that you will also carefully consider the submissions of some of those who have visited Sunyata and what it has meant to them personally to be in a space that is so unique in its ability to provide solace in nature, free from industrial objects. This is not merely about safeguarding a site and its habitants (human and non-human) but about preserving a legacy of peace, mindfulness, and connection to nature that Sunyata embodies. It's about honouring the spiritual journey of past, present, and future generations who seek refuge in the serene embrace of this sacred space and not sacrificing that even in the pursuit of other noble ideals such as wind energy.

As you deliberate on this proposal, we urge you to consider the profound implications of your decision. We stand at a pivotal moment where the choices we make will impact the future that is possible and the type of society we wish to embody. While we undoubtedly need solutions that provide for future energy, this

should not come at the expense of our spiritual sanctuaries. We must ensure that companies seeking to further such developments do not proceed with inadequate planning and consultation. While we wish to create a future of sufficient energy, we must also protect the mental and environmental well-being of our communities. Considering all of this, we humbly request that the planning committee conclude that this is not a suitable site for such a development.

We have included below the submissions of a selection of individuals who will be impacted by this development. We ask An Bord Plenála to please read these submissions and reflect on the human impact and community devastation of this development, recognising that these voices are a testament to the significance of Sunyata in their lives.

Yours Sincerely,
Elaine D'Alton

Chairperson on Behalf of Sunyata Board of Trustees

Submissions From Impacted Members of the Community

Markus Hanke (Buddhist Monk)

Vingrom Buddhistkloster Brekkenvegen

85 2607 Vingrom

Norway

I am writing to express my strong objection to the proposed wind turbine development at Knockshanvo, which would have a significant negative impact on Sunyata Buddhist Centre—a place that has been pivotal in my own personal journey. I first came to live at Sunyata in 2017, seeking a space of peace and quiet where I could explore mindfulness and learn about Buddhism. What I found there was not only a place of retreat from the demands of daily life, but a community that nurtured my spiritual growth and helped me find a deeper sense of purpose. Through my time at Sunyata, I began to immerse myself in the teachings and practices of Buddhism. The stillness and natural beauty of the centre provided the ideal environment for this journey.

Over time, what started as a personal exploration evolved into a life-changing commitment. I eventually decided to become a Buddhist monk in 2021 after living at Sunyata for many years. A decision that was deeply influenced by the experiences and guidance I received at Sunyata. I cannot overstate the importance of this place

in my transformation—it allowed me the space and support to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and inner peace in a way that simply would not have been possible elsewhere. Now, as a monk, I see how vital places like Sunyata are, not only for those of us who seek to dedicate our lives to spiritual practice, but for all people who come here to find refuge from the noise and chaos of the modern world.

Sunyata is one of the very few spaces in Ireland where individuals can engage deeply with Buddhist teachings in an environment that supports stillness and contemplation. The centre is currently under consideration to become the first Theravadan Buddhist Monastery in Ireland, with plans for monks and nuns to live onsite permanently. This would be a landmark development for Buddhism in Ireland, and it is essential that this sacred space be protected. The introduction of industrial size objects such as these wind turbines so close to Sunyata would destroy the quiet seclusion that is so crucial to the practices of meditation and mindfulness that the centre offers. It would not only disrupt the lives of those who seek peace and spiritual growth but would also jeopardise the future potential of Sunyata as a permanent monastery and spiritual home for the monastic community in Ireland.

I humbly urge you to consider the deep, personal impact that Sunyata has had on people like me, and the broader spiritual significance it holds for so many. To sacrifice this rare and irreplaceable environment for industrial development would be a tragic loss, not just for those who come here, but for Ireland as a whole.

Yours sincerely, Markus Hanke (Buddhist Monk)

The Irish Sangha Trust (IST)

<https://irishsanghatrust.ie/>

The Irish Sangha Trust (IST) is a Theravada Buddhist organisation and registered charity (CHY nO. 20123) based in Dublin, Ireland.

We wish to object to the above proposal for a windfarm in Co. Clare.

Sunyata is one of only three residential Buddhist centres in the Republic of Ireland, and the only one in the Theravada tradition.

We and countless others have, over many years, availed of the unique facilities provided at Sunyata, where we can attend taught retreats, meditation classes and traditional Buddhist ceremonies.

Sunyata is an indispensable refuge and spiritual centre for us and so many others, as it is open to those of all religions and none.

Sunyata is the only place in Ireland that can host Buddhist nuns and monks for extended periods, allowing us to attend their retreats, meditations and teaching events.

Sunyata has followed the age-old spiritual tradition of choosing a quiet, secluded and restorative location, providing a much-needed sanctuary of peace and serenity, for spiritual and emotional reflection. This opportunity for escape from demanding, busy, noisy modern life is one of its most essential characteristics.

We are profoundly aware of the need to transition away from fossil fuels and are fully supportive of the development of wind energy in Ireland.

However, the boundary of the proposed windfarm is only 100 metres from Sunyata's boundary, with the nearest turbine just 800 metres away. The constant noise of the windmills will inevitably intrude upon the tranquillity of the location, robbing it of one of its most vital functions.

Given that there are only three residential Buddhist venues in the entirety of the Republic, we would strongly suggest that Sunyata be recognised as a primary and long-standing spiritual centre, and that this windfarm be relocated.

Yours Sincerely,

Maeve Halpin M.A., M.Phil., Dip. Couns. Psych.

Chairperson

Irish Sangha Trust

Artem Kushnir

**Travessa do Forno do Maldonado 5, 3E
1100-254 Lisbon,
Portugal**

Dear An Bord Pleanála,

My name is Artem Kushnir, and I work as a Software Engineer. Since 2015, I have attended over 20 residential meditation retreats at the Sunyata Buddhist Centre. I was startled to hear about the plans to build wind farms around it, and I am deeply concerned by the absence of understanding on the part of FuturEnergy regarding the value and importance of Sunyata.

I vividly remember the first time I travelled to Sunyata from Dublin. I was astonished by the positive effect that its beautiful, calm, and quiet natural environment had on me, and the stark contrast I experienced compared to the noise and intensity of the city. Since that first visit, I've returned often to recharge in this serene environment, finding the peace and quiet that is so often elusive in urban life.

For me, Sunyata is associated with the delicate sound of raindrops hitting the window, the rustling of leaves in the wind, birds singing, the flow of a nearby stream, and the beauty of sunset. The idea that this tranquil atmosphere could be disturbed by the low-frequency hum or light flicker of wind turbines is deeply unsettling. When I raise my gaze during a meditation retreat, I want to see the vast, ancient blue sky — not industrial wind turbines dominating the horizon.

Every time I return to Sunyata, I look forward to immersing myself in the naturally peaceful and quiet environment, free from the noise pollution of the city. Many of us who come to Sunyata live in urban areas, and the centre provides much more than a place to meditate — it offers a holistic experience that nourishes our spirits, restores our health, and provides the much-needed peace and rest that city life cannot.

It is important to note that Sunyata is internationally recognized and often welcomes meditators, teachers, and monastics from the EU, the US, Asia, and beyond. As the only Theravada Buddhist residential retreat centre in Ireland and one of the few such places in Europe, it plays a significant role in the global spiritual community. We must preserve such spaces, where people can retreat for silence and a deep connection with nature.

The practice of silence is a cornerstone of Sunyata's retreats; one of the key rules during a retreat is to refrain from speaking entirely, underscoring how essential silence is to the experience. In a world filled with industrial noise, particularly in cities, we need places where people can retreat to recover, find nourishment, and engage in quiet contemplation. Sunyata is one of these few sanctuaries, where visitors can focus on hearing their inner voice and finding answers to life's challenges without the intrusion of industrial sounds or sights.

The people who established Sunyata, along with the volunteers who have supported it over the years, have poured tremendous effort into creating a centre of this quality in Ireland. The location was chosen specifically to remain undisturbed by industrial development, ensuring a tranquil environment for years to come. It would be a catastrophe to undermine this vision by building large industrial structures, like wind turbines, near Sunyata.

It is well known that meditation heightens one's sensitivity to sensory inputs — sounds, light, and even subtle vibrations. The introduction of wind turbines so close to Sunyata will likely disrupt this delicate sensory balance, as even minimal industrial noise can become a significant disturbance to those engaged in deep meditation.

While current noise regulations may address decibel levels, they fail to consider the unique impact on a place devoted to silence and reflection. Even if the projected noise levels are written to fall partially within the legal limits, the constant hum and flicker from wind turbines could profoundly disturb the retreat experience, affecting both the quality of practice and the overall environment.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that Ireland is home to many individuals who have come from, or are descended from, countries where Buddhism is widely practiced — such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Many others, regardless of descent, have chosen to practice Buddhism as their faith and spiritual path. There is a significant Buddhist community in Ireland, yet the number of places for spiritual practice and

worship is critically limited. Undermining one of the few available centres would be a setback for religious diversity and equality in Ireland.

I am shocked that FuturEnergy, after conducting what they claim were thorough field studies, failed to recognize Sunyata as a place of religious importance in their planning documents. They recognize a lot of churches, but fail to recognize a Buddhist centre.

Although I currently live in Portugal, Sunyata remains my number one destination for meditation retreats and contemplative time off. Even when looking across Europe, it is difficult to find a place which would offer the same level of spiritual retreat opportunities. That's why it is crucial to preserve and protect this unique space.

I respectfully ask you to deny the planning permission to build wind turbines near Sunyata and consider the long-term value of preserving such an important and peaceful retreat centre.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Artem Kushnir

Ajahn Dhammadharo
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
St. Margarets,
Hemel Hempstead HP1 3BZ
United Kingdom

Dear Planning Committee,

I am a Buddhist monk who has been teaching and contributing to Sunyata Buddhist Centre over the last 5 years and so I am making this submission in regards to the proposed installation of a wind-farm on the 12 O'clock Hills. These are the major points I would like to raise in opposition to the proposed project:

The installation of the proposed wind-farm could, and almost definitely will, have a devastating effect on the centre. This is unacceptable given that:

- a) The centre has been an established haven of peace and education—a spiritual refuge—both for locals and people visiting the centre from abroad for over 20 years now. A huge amount of time, energy, funding, sweat, and tears has gone into the continuation of the centre and the nourishing experiences that many gain from the retreats provided by the centre. The disturbance coming from both the enormous and unsightly eyesore of the wind-turbines and the incessant, endless whirring of the blades will, at best, undermine the activities of the centre and, at worst, render it completely useless as a meditation space. It is not at all worth the risk in our view.
- b) The risk is unnecessary; there are many other options in terms of locations where the wind-farm could be elsewhere installed. It does not need to be this close to people's houses and establishments.

c) There is clearly an (un)ethical component at play here and it deserves to be mentioned: Anyone with even a lingering regard for basic standards of human decency knows that when someone else was there first, you don't just move in and do what you want, completely numb to what was going on in the area before you came along. Members of a society—any society—are only able to cooperate and live together in relative harmony and good-will because we still respect such basic standards of decency. It's why we don't push our way past people smaller than we are when lining up to board a bus or jump the queue when buying groceries.

Best wishes
Ajahn Dhammadharo

Paddy Boyle

Hillside, Aghada,

Midleton, County Cork

I wish to lodge my deep concerns regarding the proposed wind farm close to Sunyata Buddhist Center.

Sunyata is a Buddhist meditation center, a place specifically for spiritual meditation and practice. It is a place of seclusion where anyone who wished to receive spiritual support or to develop their spiritual practice can come.

Many world renowned Buddhist monks and nuns have lead meditation retreats and other religious practices over many years.

It is supported by lay Buddhists from all over Ireland and from further afield. It should have the same rights of deep respect as any church, Mosque or synagogue in Ireland. Not to do so amounts to disrespect and discrimination against the Buddhist community in Ireland.

To put a wind farm next to a Catholic church would be unheard of. This is a place of worship, not a tourist attraction or holiday camp.

To put a wind farm where it is planned would be insulting to Irish Buddhists and to Buddhists, sacrilegious.

I register my complaint.

Paddy Boyle

Eamonn Wallace

Ballyhall,

Windgap,

Co.Kilkenny

My name is Eamonn Wallace, Ballyhall, Windgap, Co.Kilkenny and I wish to object to the proposed Knockshanvo/Snaty Wind Farm. When I found out the near location and size of the turbine masts to the Sunyata Buddhist centre I was shocked.

This is a very important retreat centre which is used throughout the year. The centre is run as a voluntary non profit charity open to all. Regular mediative retreats are held on here which are open to all who are looking for spirituality, peace and quietness in their lives. This remote and peaceful location is an ideal place for such retreats.

I have been visiting and attending retreats at Sunyata for about twenty years and have found the centre important in my life especially in times of stress and in recuperating from a serious heart attack. I have met many people there over the years from all walks of life ...with one thing in common, looking for peace and quietness in their lives.

Sunyata is unique as a Buddhist and spiritual centre in Ireland. It caters for the Buddhist community but is open to all. Its location and remoteness is important to its status as a centre with its peace and tranquillity. This proposed wind farm and especially its scale and proximity will have detrimental consequences for its continuation. It is difficult to see how the centre can carry on especially during the construction phase.

I would ask the Planning Authority to reject this proposed Wind farm on this proposed site.

Yours Sincerely,
Eamonn Wallace

Ross Whitmarsh

**Kells,
Corofin**

Co. Clare

I have been attending Sunyata Buddhist Centre for over 12 years, and it has become an essential part of my life—both spiritually and personally. Before discovering Sunyata, I was struggling to find my place in society, feeling disconnected and adrift. Sunyata became a sanctuary, offering me not only a space for solace but also profound spiritual guidance that has shaped my journey ever since. It supported the introspection I so deeply needed at that time, and still do, allowing me to reconnect with a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in my life.

Over the years, I've come to understand just how fortunate I am to have had access to such a place, especially when I felt I had nowhere else to turn. The centre provided a warm, supportive environment that not only encouraged personal reflection but also fostered community and friendship. Spiritually, it has been a place of awakening for me, a foundation upon which I've built a sense of inner peace and a clearer understanding of my role in the world.

Through my time at Sunyata, I have met many people on similar paths, developing deep and lasting friendships that have helped restore my trust in others. These connections have enriched my spiritual journey, showing me the importance of human connection on the path to inner growth. As the years passed, I became more involved in the centre, taking on roles in maintaining and organizing its operations. For someone who had arrived disengaged from society, this was a transformative experience. I learned to trust others and understood the value of investing time and energy into something I truly believe in, both for my own well-being and for the benefit of the wider community.

Sunyata is not only a place of personal transformation, but it also serves as a spiritual Buddhist lighthouse for many. Its loss would be a devastating blow to those who, like me, have found meaning, healing, and community within its sacred space. The impact of such a place cannot be overstated—it has provided me with a sense of direction, belonging, and a deeper connection to life itself.

Kind Regards,

Ross Whitmarsh.

Stan and Clare De Freitas

49 Elizabeth Road,

Seaton,

Devon, EX12 2DS,

England

We would like to object to the building of a windfarm so near to Sunyata Buddhist Centre. This is a unique spiritual centre where a quiet and tranquil environment is essential to be able to meditate and tune into the silence which allows one to regain true psychological and spiritual health. The building of 9 turbines (especially the 3 nearest the Centre) and the noise they would generate would significantly disrupt this peace and would make the continuation of the Centre impossible.

We founded Sunyata Buddhist Centre (or Sunyata Retreat Centre as it was then known) in 1996. We received a LEADER grant in 1999, managed by Dóirín Graham and under the direction of Father Harry Bohan, to build a meditation hall. The purpose of the hall was to provide a space where meditation (or Mindfulness) could be taught to anyone interested: Buddhists, Christians, those of any faith or none - anyone seeking peace of mind. The hall was officially opened in 2000 and the Centre went on to become very successful. Many people – local, from all over Ireland and international - came on retreat; there were multifaith gatherings, yoga,

addiction support and other religious groups , such as the Sikh community from Limerick and Shannon renting the hall. We left in 2004 due to family reasons but the Centre was carried on by other supporters who formed a Trust. We still visit regularly and are delighted to see that Sunyata has continued to be a refuge for many people.

We are greatly dismayed to see the plans for the proposed windfarm so near the Centre - the site boundary would be less than 100m away and the nearest turbine just over 800m from the Centre. Even the noise and disruption of building the turbines, let alone their subsequent operation, would completely destroy the peace and serenity of Sunyata which is integral to it operating as a retreat centre. It seems counterproductive that a venture that was supported by a government grant at one stage should be destroyed due to planning permission for an adjacent wind farm being given by another government body at a later date.

We are also dismayed to hear that Sunyata has been classified, not as a religious site of significant cultural and spiritual significance, but rather as a tourist attraction. This classification is completely incorrect and shows that the planning process has not engaged sufficiently with Sunyata to find out really what a sort of place it is. Sunyata is definitely a religious site and the full impact of the windfarm on it as a spiritual centre, as if it were a church, should be assessed under the Planning and Development Act of 2000. Sunyata is one of only a few Buddhist centres in Ireland and the only Theravadan Buddhist Centre. By ignoring its importance to the Buddhist community of Ireland the planning process risks indirect religious discrimination under the Equal Status Act 2000-2018. Sunyata is of huge significance to the Buddhist community but also to many other people of different faiths or none who have benefitted from visiting the Centre

We fully support windfarms and the production of environmentally friendly energy. However, the siting of such enterprises is key. Maybe another site can be found further away. Sunyata Buddhist Centre is a jewel on the hillside between Sixmilebridge and Broadford, a place of true tranquillity where one can come to practice meditation and to recover from the pressures of modern life. It has been of huge benefit to many people and should be allowed continue to do so. Therefore, we strongly urge you not to grant planning permission for this windfarm so close to the Centre.

Your Sincerely,

Stan and Clare De Freitas

Cathal Costello

Don Kiem Hermitage,

Chaiya, Surat Thani,

Thailand

Hello my name is Cathal and I'm a 27 year old Buddhist monk living in Thailand. I visited Sunyata 3 times over the course of about a year and a half. The facilities support and environment of Sunyata was crucial for me working on my mental health and well being.

Please don't ruin this environment for other people out there seeking solutions to their inner problems. This is one of the few places in Ireland where there is a community of like minded people interested in practicing meditation together.

While wind farms are an excellent development solution and I can even see them beautifully striking out of Wicklow mountains from Carlow and gain benefit directly, to have them disrupting a place like Sunyata is really a tragedy for those who understand the essentials of themselves for the happiness of themselves and benefit of others.

Please find another way in which these farms don't ruin the location of Sunyata.

Cathal Costello from Carlow.

Ann McCarry

1A Cois Na Habhann,

Old Bawn, Tallaght,

Dublin 24

I am objecting to the planned proposal of wind turbines near the site of the Sunyata Buddhist Centre in Snaty Co. Clare. I am a Trainee Psychotherapist and am very interested in mindfulness and meditation as a means to relax, soothe and ground myself and also to do the same for my clients. I see a lot of clients who suffer with anxiety and stress, sometimes to a debilitatingly severe level, and my own experience and training in mindfulness and meditation has been very helpful for them.

I started attending silent meditation retreats last year and attended Sunyata for the first time early this year for a ten-day silent meditation led by a Buddhist Monk who had travelled from Thailand. To me, Sunyata was a paradise on earth – firstly for the beautiful unspoilt countryside in which it is located, featuring wildflower meadows, woodlands and the local '12 o'clock hills' walking trail, and secondly for the peace and tranquillity of the space, being deep in the countryside away from the noise of modern life.

I have attended a few mindfulness and meditation retreats and have always been struck by the high number of healthcare workers attending, particularly counsellors, nurses, or those who work in palliative care. Retreat centres like Sunyata are not just for those who want to escape a busy life and relax for a while, although they serve this function too, but are also important training grounds for those of us who serve the community in providing health care, in particular, mental health care, where we can restore and replenish our own inner resources of calm and strength so that we can better serve those we treat.

Sunyata has been listed in this proposal as a 'tourist attraction' which demeans its important function of contributing to the health and wellbeing of the community. Sunyata is a retreat centre that provides a calm, restorative space in which to restore our health and wellbeing and, for those of us who provide healthcare to the community, allows us to bring our experience and practice of meditation and mindfulness back into the community to help others restore their own health and wellbeing.

Yours Sincerely,
Ann McCarry

Bryan Nestor

Cahermore

Golf Links Road

Ennis

Co.Clare

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong objection against the proposed Knockshanvo Windfarm Development, in County Clare. I am a regular volunteer at the Sunyata Buddhist Retreat Centre, situated a mere 90 meters from the boundary of the development and 891 to the closest turbine.

In July of 2019, I personally discovered Sunyata during a difficult period in my life. My mental health had deteriorated significantly, and I struggled to find hope. However, finding Sunyata gave me the rare and invaluable opportunity to explore inner peace, with the hope that my life could indeed improve. The silence and seclusion that Sunyata offers are essential for such healing. The tranquillity and people there created the conditions I needed to step away from the burdens of daily life and experience clarity, calm, belonging and emotional balance. These conditions are the foundation of Sunyata's mission and are instrumental to the well-being of individuals who, like myself, seek to find a path toward healing and personal growth.

To say that Sunyata Buddhist Centre made a significant impact on me would be an understatement and it's hard to put into words the positive changes that Sunyata has brought into my life. At Sunyata I met people who we're deeply committed to improving their psychological and spiritual wellbeing, while supporting others towards the same goal. The people of Sunyata welcomed me with warmth and interest. I felt a true belonging and kinship with many of the practitioners, as well as with the secluded landscape and the wooded areas at Sunyata and its surrounding areas, including 12 O Clock Hills.

I have had experiences at Sunyata Buddhist Centre that have shaped me and changed me in ways that have been nothing short of miraculous. I took inspiration from some of the regular volunteers there and I moved to Thailand in February 2020 to further my exploration of the Buddhist teachings and practice.

I have since spent time in Buddhist centres and monasteries in Ireland, Thailand and most recently New Zealand, the majority of which are associated with the Thai Forest Tradition, Sunyata Buddhist Centre being a branch of this tradition.

Sunyata teaches people tools to cope with life's challenges, while also enhancing their mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. It is a sanctuary of peace and quiet where people can find refuge and rest from the busyness and constant noise of daily life. It is a place where people can recharge and explore their inner landscape in a safe and guided way with the help of the centre's excellent teachers, as well as the visiting teachers, monks and nuns.

I moved home to Ireland in February 2024 after 4 years living abroad. A contributing factor in my decision making to return to Clare was the knowledge that I have a tranquil safe haven, a community and safe space where I can experience peace and silence.

To think that the peace, solitude and quiet of Sunyata is being threatened by these proposed windfarms is extremely worrying. Not only for myself but for the countless beings that visit Sunyata and for those who have not yet discovered this hidden gem in the hills of East Clare.

Sunyata Buddhist Centre promotes such practices as mindfulness meditation, that play a crucial role in preventive mental health care for many who visit the centre. I'm speaking of course from first person experience regarding this matter.

Mindfulness and meditation are core to Sunyata's approach to mental well-being. Research findings has shown that mindfulness practices can effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and depression in both clinical and non-clinical populations [1,2].

This is significant in light of a recent research which found the mental health prevalence rates in Ireland are relatively higher compared to international estimates, according to findings from a 2022 nationally representative survey (3).

Moreover, with the Irish government providing an allocation of only 5.6% of total health expenditure towards mental health in 2024 (4) - *WHO recommends 12%-*

community organisations that promote positive mental health and wellbeing, and which lie outside of the health sector must be protected and strengthened, as was recommended by the HSE's Mental Health Promotion Plan, 2022-2027 (5).

It's with strong conviction that I make the case that Sunyata Buddhist Centre is one of the community organisations that contributes to Ireland's National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027 through its role in fostering mental well-being and providing a valuable service that aligns with several key aspects of Ireland's mental health strategy, such as supporting holistic mental health care, promoting preventative and community centred care, facilitating stress reduction and green space benefits, supporting local social prescribing initiatives and reducing social isolation, to name a few.

Personally, through Sunyata I found a support for my spiritual life and a sense of true belonging which is a crucial pillar to my psychological wellbeing. I've got my hands in the soil while in the gardens, planted trees, trimmed hedges, cut grass, painted rooms, and cooked meals for others and shared personal stories of life ups and downs. I've enjoyed the quiet country space to practice mindfulness and the various Buddhist practices, while also practicing meditation in the tranquil Dhamma hall several times a day. I've learned about Buddhist meditation from the people there and the teachers, and I have gladly offered my time and energy to do chores, contributing to the up keep for future generations.

Most who have volunteered their time at Sunyata would likely say they have shared in these experiences I've just mentioned. I would think that their mental, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing has been positively affected as a direct consequence of spending time at Sunyata Buddhist Centre and engaging with its array of services.

The final point I would like to make is in relation to Futur Energy's Planning Application for Knockshanvo Windfarm, particularly the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. I want to stress that Sunyata Buddhist Centre is not merely a tourist attraction, which it was wrongly misclassified as in Futur Energy's Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Knockshanvo Windfarm, under Chapter 5 Population and Health.

Why wasn't Sunyata classified correctly as a place of religious and spiritual significance, while in the EIAR there was mention of catholic churches, holy wells, and burial grounds as such? This is a glaring oversight and must leave one suspect of the lack of due diligence from Futur Energy in their community engagement with a religious community. In the report Futur Energy have failed to give Sunyata and the people who benefit from its existence any confidence that the centre won't be significantly impacted by Knockshano Windfarm.

An Bord Plenala must take into account that Futur Energy have potentially engaged in indirect religious discrimination under the Equal Status Act 2000-2028. Moreover, the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires that the impact to spiritual and cultural sites, such as Sunyata Buddhist Centre, must be fully assessed.

Futur Energy has inadequately addressed the specific impacts of noise, visual intrusion, and potential disruptions to a silent retreat centre, failing to substantiate how proposed mitigation measures will effectively protect the retreat's tranquil

environment. Without a clear, evidence-backed mitigation plan, the windfarm development risks compromising the retreat center's essential purpose and diminishing its role in supporting the psychological and spiritual well-being of its visitors.

I ask that An Bord Pleanála give careful consideration to this personal objection and the points made. I respectfully request that the proposed windmill farm must not be given approval to go ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Bryan Nestor

Paul McNamee
Kells, Corofin
Co. Clare

V95K8W7

To Whom It May Concern,

As a Psychology Lecturer specialising in mental health and mindfulness, I am writing to express my deep objection to the proposed Knockshanvo Wind Farm by FuturEnergy, a proposal that is both shocking and, frankly, disgusting in its complete disregard for one of the few mindfulness based mental health sanctuaries in this country. Sunyata Buddhist Centre, which has provided over 25 years of service to countless individuals in need of mental respite, personal growth, and mindfulness practice, is being put at risk due to this proposed development. The planning application's lack of consideration for this centre, a vital resource run entirely by volunteers and sustained solely by donations, shows a blatant lack of understanding of the essential role Sunyata plays in our community and society at large.

Having attended Sunyata Buddhist Centre for over 12 years, I have experienced firsthand the peace and reflection it offers, not only as a participant in residential retreats but also as a guest and volunteer. For thousands of people, Sunyata is an irreplaceable haven—one that not only provides a unique service but undoubtedly reduces pressure on Ireland's already stretched mental health services. Sunyata is the only centre of its kind in Ireland; the spiritual grounding it provides to those who practice Buddhism and mindfulness cannot be replicated elsewhere. Allowing the visual and auditory intrusion of large-scale industrial turbines would destroy the centre's atmosphere, undermining the very essence of what makes it invaluable to our society.

As a psychologist, I am deeply concerned that An Bord Pleanála would even consider allowing this proposal to proceed. There is a legal, moral, and societal duty to protect places like Sunyata, which provide an essential service for mental health and well-being. This proposal not only disregards Sunyata's role but also appears to misclassify it entirely, treating it as a general community amenity rather than as a site of significant religious and spiritual importance. I would argue that this misclassification alone warrants immediate rejection of the proposal. FuturEnergy's failure to respect the centre's distinct needs and disregard for due consultation with

its community reveal a half-hearted, unprofessional submission that should be unacceptable in the eyes of any planning authority.

Further, the lack of consideration for cumulative effects, particularly given the planning applications already submitted for other turbines in the region, shows a lack of respect for planning law and a lack of concern for long-term impacts on both the environment and community. Sunyata's quiet contemplation cabin, which sits in the woods as one of the closest structures to the proposed turbine locations, represents an ecological and heritage treasure—a place for peaceful reflection that would be permanently disturbed by industrial noise and visual disruption. Allowing this project to proceed as proposed would amount to ecological and spiritual vandalism, an unforgivable loss to both our natural and spiritual environments.

In addition to these missteps, the planning application's neglect to consider Sunyata's significance raises questions about FuturEnergy's commitment to treating all sites of religious significance with the same respect. If other sites of religious heritage, primarily those of the dominant faith, are given due consideration, then why should a unique and deeply spiritual place like Sunyata be treated with less regard?

An Bord Pleanála has a duty not only to uphold planning standards but to demonstrate that it values all aspects of our society's religious and cultural landscape. This is a matter of equal treatment under the law and respect for the diverse needs of our community. Any one of the above issues should be grounds for the immediate rejection of this proposal, and I strongly urge An Bord Pleanála to consider each of these points carefully. Sunyata's preservation is essential, not just for its community but for Ireland as a society

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I trust An Bord Pleanála will fulfill its responsibility to protect Sunyata, a sanctuary that cannot be replaced if sacrificed for corporate gain.

Yours faithfully,
Paul McNamee

Teresa Crowley

30 Findlater Street

Glasthule

Co. Dublin

A96 A320

I wish to put forward my personal objection to the above proposed planning permission.

For over a decade I have sought tranquillity and nurturing in the special place that is Sunyata Buddhist Centre. I feel really disturbed that there is now a request for planning permission to locate a windfarm with its site boundary being less than 100 metres away, and the nearest turbine just over 800 metres from the Sunyata Buddhist Centre.

If planning permission is given for this windfarm plant, it will truly destroy the very core of Sunyata which is a place of peace and tranquillity in harmony with the abundance of nature. The proposed site is totally unsuitable for such a large and intrusive industry. Hence I kindly ask you to deny this application.

I strongly object to Sunyata being described as a tourist attraction. It is the complete opposite. Sunyata is a unique, spiritual, religious centre where one can find tranquillity, solitude, spiritual healing and teachings in an inclusive, non-judgemental, restful and safe space set amongst an undisturbed natural environment. This offers an enormous gift to the many who come there to unburden the stresses and sufferings of modern life, especially when they come from cities and busy urban environments and workplaces.

The integrity of Sunyata is borne out by its inclusivity of all people, regardless of their financial situation, to come and stay, rest, reflect and learn. All are welcome. In how many places on this our island of Ireland can one avail of this exceptional kindness and inclusiveness? We, the people of Ireland, should be grateful to and celebrate Sunyata for the immense work it does to bring peace and harmony back to the people seeking balance in their lives.

People come to Sunyata to stay in a place that is in a very natural state, not looking for luxuries, but to be immersed in the quiet surroundings of Sunyata and the peaceful lands and forests around it. It is not right that Industry and noise would arrive into this very special environment and disturb the very essence of what Sunyata gifts to the people who come here.

Personally, at a time when I was struggling with events in my life and I needed peace, guidance and nurturing, I came many times to stay in Sunyata. There I was embraced by its community and was able to learn how to return my body and mind to a place of homeostasis. The peace and beauty of nature in that environment is absolutely conducive to well-being, and I continue to find this each time I return there.

I cannot express adequately the gratitude I have for the nurturing I have received at Sunyata, and I hope I will continue to be able to do so for the rest of my life.

Yours,

Teresa Crowley

Sarah-Jane Burton

89 Lime Tree Road,

Westwood,

Ballea Road,

Carrigaline,

Co. Cork

P43NH29.

083-8888656

In June 2010, following the birth of my second child, I was diagnosed with Post Natal depression. Following a referral from my GP, I was an out patient in Mental Health Services from June 2010 to May 2015. I was prescribed medication and as part of my recovery from depression and when I was deemed able I participated in a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course which is where I learned to meditate. On taking up a regular meditation practice I very quickly noticed an improvement in my mental well being. This motivated me to keep up a daily practice. I started attending meditation retreats in April 2012 and this is when I noticed a significant shift in my well being. This was the impetus for continuing to attend retreats at Sunyata Buddhist Centre. In addition to my daily meditation practice I was attending multiple retreats a year, and after each retreat I just got better and better. The fact that all Sunyata Buddhist Centre offer is on a donation basis makes the attending of meditation retreats and workshops accessible to all people, regardless of your economic situation, background or religious beliefs. To go into an environment where you are welcomed and accepted, without question, without judgment and given such support for your mental health, without a fixed charge is unheard of.

Seeing the profound impact that practicing mindfulness was having not only on my own well being, but on our whole family I was keen to share this with my children. In August 2014, in its founding year, I started to attend Sunyata Family Camp with my 2 children. It has been our privilege to attend every year since. The children learn mindfulness practices that have been proven to help emotional regulation, increase attention span, and foster a greater sense of connection within families. And as importantly, they spend time in community, immersed in nature learning how to live together mindfully.

I have personally experienced my children grow with the camp, arriving each year a little older, a little more aware, and significantly more capable of managing their emotions and connecting with the world around them. To witness such a transformation is nothing short of remarkable. From the first year of attending where they had difficulty sitting still or managing their overwhelming feelings to now seeing them use the tools that they learned at camp in daily life.

Watching other children grow over the years has been equally rewarding. Families return year after year, and we've created a small community where our children can share this journey together. I have seen kids who initially struggled with shyness or anxiety gradually open up, becoming more confident and more grounded. The camp environment, free from the distractions of modern life, allows them to connect with themselves, with nature, and with each other in a way that is simply not possible anywhere else.

There is no other facility in the country that offers mindfulness family camps by donation, making it accessible to families like ours who may not otherwise be able to afford such a deeply enriching experience.

I cannot express how crucial the Sunyata Buddhist Centre was in contributing to my recovery from depression. The location of the Centre is paramount to what they offer. It is a secluded site of great natural beauty, far from the busyness of everyday life, where you are encouraged to disconnect from the world of technology and your usual daily schedule so that you connect with yourself. Sitting outside in the peace and quiet of the natural surroundings, listening to the tweeting of the birds and the waterfall in the distance. It is a community of volunteers that keep the centre running, manage the retreats and contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings and the site. There is literally no other place in Ireland which offers such an invaluable resource to the community.

It is a travesty that this sacred space, a place of quiet seclusion in nature, is being sacrificed in this way. The impact of such a development is not just physical; it strikes at the heart of what Sunyata has offered so many for so long. I fear that, once this space is lost, there will be nowhere else in the country where families like mine can experience these benefits in such an authentic and accessible way. I urge you to consider what will be lost, not only for the current generation of families, but for the many that could have come in the future to experience the same transformative growth that we have.

Kind Regards,

Sarah-Jane Burton

Phil Brown

Dangan,

Tulla,

Co. Clare

V95 A8X3,

087 2368777

As a practicing Buddhist, who has been a long standing supporter of Sunyata, and being a frequent user of the facilities there, I am concerned to hear that the environmental impact assessment for the proposed Knockshanvo Wind Farm has incorrectly classified Sunyata as a tourist attraction. This is in no way correct - as a member of the local community I regularly meditate, as part of my spiritual practice, in the facilities available at Sunyata. It is a spiritual centre, and is the only such spiritual centre in this part of Ireland. As such, it is an invaluable resource in our community.

Peaceful surroundings, and an absence of visual distraction, form an essential part of what Sunyata has to offer the Buddhist community. I am concerned that this proposed development will negatively impact upon the environment at Sunyata, both in terms of sound pollution and visual disturbance. This impact would be unacceptable for the spiritual centre that is Sunyata.

Jennifer Huang

0863509408

9 Beresford Terrace,

Sea Road

Arklow

Co. Wicklow

Y17PY74

The Knockshanvo wind farm proposes output of 4.2 MWh of electricity per year, which is very attractive, but if a meditation retreat center that has been operating for two decades solely on donations, serving thousands of people from around the world in their toughest times of life, may have to close its doors because of it, would people still feel so comfortable using that electricity?

Sunyata opens its doors to anyone. Some may need a place for spiritual practice in the form of meditation, some seek kind, nonjudgmental company during difficulties in life, some may just need a warm place to sleep for a few nights. There are also many retreats, mental health and meditation workshops, and family programs available to the general public. All of this runs on donations, and yet in today's materialistic world, it has survived for two decades. There aren't many other places like this in the world, let alone Ireland.

Sunyata is a kind place, operated and cherished by some of the most compassionate and peaceful people in society. It does not seek conflict with the wind farm developers nor does it want to stand in the way of renewable energy, but its unique position needs to be protected.

There are special areas of conservation declared based on rare species of birds or animals, and practically no development is allowed in these areas. Can we just turn a blind eye when it comes to places like Sunyata and its need for serenity and peacefulness for the thousands of people that the center has served over the years?

Sunyata is a silent retreat center; it needs silence, and people need a place to retreat from the busyness of the modern way of life. The wind farm has never provided any evidence that its presence will not impact the peace and serenity of a silent retreat center that's right at its doorstep, 90 meters from the wind farm site boundary. There is a noise analysis comparing the wind farm noise with the background sound at Sunyata, but the background sound at Sunyata is birds singing, bees buzzing, wind flowing through trees. How would you feel if you added some low humming turbine sound to it, regardless of how low it is, and tried to meditate in it?

There are many places to build wind farms, but there is only one Sunyata. Please protect this unique place and move the wind farm further away from the Sunyata meditation center.

Best regards,

Jennifer

Eavan Dempsey

85 Cul na Greine

Shannon

Co Clare

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0833092256

As an avid hiker and a weekly walker at the 12 O'clock hills I am shocked that this area was even considered for such a wind farm. I have been following the campaign over the past couple of years and disappointed to see it's still pushing forward. I'd like to do everything I can to try help that not happen.

I have been a visitor at Sunyata many times over the years with my children and family members and feel we are so blessed to have such a unique beautiful & spiritual place so close to home.

I have seen the positive benefits of family members spending time in Sunyata and have loved walking through the forests and bumping into the monks over the years. How lucky are we to have this amazing centre so close to home?

Please find some factual information from Sunyata.

Why This Matters:

- **Legal Oversight:** Sunyata should be considered under population and human health and cultural heritage protections, similar to Christian churches and holy wells included in the EIAR. The Planning and Development Act 2000 requires that the impact on spiritual and cultural sites be fully assessed, yet Sunyata was wrongfully excluded from this consideration.
- **Noise and Visual Disruption:** Turbines up to 185m high could emit significant noise, which would disrupt the silent environment essential for Sunyata's meditation retreats. The EIAR fails to properly account for Sunyata's reliance on peace and quiet, which is crucial for its operations.
- **Religious Discrimination:** By focusing on Christian religious sites while neglecting Sunyata, the planning process risks indirect religious discrimination under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018. Sunyata deserves the same consideration as other cultural and religious sites.
- **Failure to Consult:** The Aarhus Convention mandates public participation in environmental decisions. However, the planning process did not engage substantively with Sunyata. This is evidence by the categorising of Sunyata as a tourist attraction when basic research would have revealed otherwise.
- **Biodiversity and Hydrology Concerns:** The surrounding natural environment is integral to Sunyata's mindfulness practices. Construction and turbine operation could disrupt local wildlife and water sources, impacting the centre's operations and the well-being of its visitors.

Why Sunyata Deserves Protection

- Sunyata is the only centre of its kind in Ireland, offering a crucial space for spiritual growth and mental well-being.
- The centre is a vital part of the cultural and spiritual fabric of the Buddhist community
- Failing to recognize Sunyata's significance is not only a procedural oversight but also illegal, as basic research and consultation would have revealed its unique standing in Ireland's religious landscape.

I know you will do all you can to prevent these completely unnecessary windfarms from coming to the Clare area. Out at sea is where they belong, not in our back gardens. The

damage to our physical and mental wellbeing is also another major factor to consider in having such a dangerous wind farm so close to residential homes and then we have our wonderful Shannon Airport to consider. The reasons why not to have this farm are far greater than any reason of why our beautiful home area was chosen.

Bríd Hehir Kennedy

Finanagh, Quin, Co Clare. V95K7P0

As a local non-Buddhist woman, I have attended Sunyata frequently over the last ten years or more, as someone exploring spiritual experiences and development. Sunyata has been spiritually stimulating and formative for me. I have learned a great deal from attending there, through supported personal reflection, guided meditations, retreats, and other events and practices.

Sunyata Buddhist Centre offers spiritual refuge, teaching, guidance and opportunities for practice of meditation, reflection and spiritual renewal. I have found it to be diverse in its scope, never exclusionary, welcoming of people with Buddhist and non-Buddhist identities and identification alike. It provides open access to their Buddhist and non-Buddhist community to twice daily practices as well as a busy schedule of retreats, family events, women's meditation days, children's' days and much more. It also provides a simple monastic place of refuge if someone wants to stay overnight or for a time. It does not charge, and offerings are on a voluntary-giving basis. From attending events in Sunyata I know that people come from far and wide, from all over Ireland and from abroad to sometimes sample and sometimes immerse themselves in spirituality. Thus, Sunyata offers an extraordinary spiritual centre for very many people, including myself.

It has been a life-changing experience for me to spend time there, whether at daily practices or at retreats. It is uniquely open to all faiths and none. It offers training in Mindfulness practices, which are exceptional, and again open to all. Mindfulness is a growing Mental Health intervention, and enables growth in self-regulation and well-being. I expect that many have practiced or tried Mindfulness at some period in their lives, and found it of benefit. Although Sunyata does not offer itself as a therapeutic site, as a psychotherapist and psychologist, I can professionally and personally attest to the validity

and strength of the mindfulness practices that are fostered there. It also offers group meetings weekly to support people including those with addictions, and other personal struggles, for which I have heard the highest praise both from people who have attended and professionals working in the field.

How the noise and visual disturbances of the wind farm would affect the community and its ability to provide a serene environment.

From the above it is obvious to those who read this submission that the location of Sunyata as it is presently - in its quiet, serene, rustic location on the foot hills of Sliabh Bearn, overlooking the beautiful scenes of Kilkishen, Glenwood, their lakes and rural elegance - is ideally suited for the spiritual practices that are available to a large national and local community. I have been in the presence of extraordinary bird-life there, and know that the living practices of those who live and stay there are environmentally sustainable and in harmony with their setting.

Locating a wind farm in such close proximity as is proposed (The site boundary will be less than 90 metres away and the nearest turbine 891 metres away) is shocking, as such structures would significantly detract from the present benefits of tranquillity and quiet, so necessary for both spiritual and wellbeing benefits as I have outlined above. Meditation and retreat as practiced in Sunyata's calm setting as they are at present, would be ruined by the noise and visual interference of the proposed development.

I strongly urge that this not go ahead. I submit that from what I observe, the current planning application has failed to account for Sunyata as a spiritual centre in sections on 'population health and community' and instead incorrectly suggested it was 'a tourist attraction'. It is not a tourist attraction. Its primary purpose is spiritual. That 'visitors' enjoy the tranquillity of a monastic place, does not imply it is a tourist attraction and this is a fallacious designation.

While I understand and strongly support the provision of alternative energy sources to the national grid, I believe this ought to be done with due sensitivity to sites of spiritual practice

and significance, such as Sunyata.

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