



Irish Wind Energy Association,
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Senior Executive Officer,
Planning Department,
Kildare County Council,
Áras Chill Dara,
Devoy Park, Naas,
Co. Kildare

By online portal

29th November 2016

Dear Planning Team,

RE: Proposed Material Alterations to Kildare County Development Plan 2017 - 2023

1.0 Introduction

The *Irish Wind Energy Association* (IWEA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Material Alterations to Kildare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 and looks forward to engaging constructively with Kildare County Council throughout the development plan process.

IWEA is Ireland's leading renewable energy representative body and as such, it has an active interest in the potential for sustainable energy. IWEA is committed to promoting the use of wind energy in Ireland and beyond, as an economically viable and environmentally sound alternative to other forms of non-renewable generation. IWEA also promotes awareness and understanding of wind power as a primary renewable energy resource. The magnitude of the Irish wind resource and the potential for its development has been appreciated for some years and there is a growing appreciation for the amount of energy that can be delivered through wind, as in the first six months of 2016 alone, over 20% of our electricity generated has been met by indigenous wind energy.

Renewable energy development is a vital part of Ireland's strategy to tackle the major challenges facing us today – ensuring a secure supply of cost effective indigenous energy, allowing renewables to support

inward investment, and meeting binding international climate goals. Wind energy, in particular has a key role to play in meeting these challenges. IWEA supports a strategic and transparent approach to proper planning and sustainable development.

At the outset, we all must acknowledge Ireland's need to support renewable energy, which also stems from its EU commitments. These include EU Directive 2009/28/EC on the Promotion of Renewable Energy Sources, which came into force in April 2009 and which establishes a binding target of 20% of overall EU energy consumption coming from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland's target under the Directive is for renewable resources to account for 16% of total energy consumption by 2020. Failure to meet these targets could result in EU sanctions. In line with these commitments, the Government also has a target for electricity from renewable energy sources (RES-E) of 40% by 2020.

The European Union is also now in the process of agreeing the framework for a further series of targets for renewable energy towards 2030. In October 2014, Ireland agreed to new EU 2030 targets, which seek a 40% reduction in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and a binding EU target for renewable energy of "at least 27%". As a significant proportion of new renewable capacity will likely be provided by on-shore wind, the 40% target is a significant challenge for the Irish wind industry as a whole. An approximate doubling of wind capacity will need to be installed on-shore in Ireland within the coming years if we are to meet our 2020 RES-E target. Ireland has also signed the Paris Climate Agreement with Irish ratification of this ambitious global agreement due shortly.

The expansion of the Irish wind industry will be an extremely positive economic development for the entire Country and, indeed, for Kildare County. The ready availability of a renewable energy supply source is increasingly becoming one of the core attractions for inward investment of large organisations such as Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple. It will result in direct local investment, job creation, as well as increased local authority income through commercial rates and development contributions. Recent published figures¹ showed that wind farms were amongst the top twenty companies in the country that pay the most to the council in rates. At the same time, new wind energy development will also bring about a reduction of GHG emissions and help tackle global climate change.

¹ <http://www.donegaldemocrat.ie/news/news/225165/top-twenty-businesses-pay-6-8m-in-commercial-rates.html>

IWEA recognise that a robust and efficient “plan lead” system is required in Kildare County, and that the County Development Plan will be key in the responsible development and the delivery of the wide reaching economic, social and environmental benefits of Kildare’s indigenous renewable resources. Relevant strategic policy documents, such as the new County Development Plan, must assist in enabling Ireland to develop its natural green energy resources and meet our EU2020 targets. IWEA members are involved in developing more than 85% of the wind farm capacity that is planned to be built from now to 2020 and we continue to contribute proactively and positively to the development of local, regional and national strategic planning.

2.0 Observations and Recommendations

IWEA made a submission to the Draft Kildare County Development Plan (Draft CDP) 2017-2023 on the 13th July 2016. In its submission, IWEA was clear in expressing its concerns with some of the proposals presented in the Draft CDP. IWEA noted the proposal not to carry out a Wind Energy Strategy (WES) until such time as the current review of the existing Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 (WEDG) had been completed. Furthermore IWEA requested that *“Kildare County Council states within the Draft CDP that the current Wind Farm Planning Guidelines (2006) remain in place until any final revisions or updates on specific aspects of those Guidelines are signed into force by the Minister”*, to this end IWEA welcomes Kildare County Council CEO’s comments that:

The concerns raised in a number of the submissions in relation to wind energy developments in the county are noted. The most up-to-date Government guidance on this matter remain the ‘Wind Energy Developments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2006’. In December 2013, the DoECLG published a draft targeted review of these guidelines in relation to Noise, Proximity and Shadow Flicker. The Department indicated that it is proposed to update the relevant sections of the existing Guidelines on these specific issues. All other sections of the 2006 guidelines will remain in place. To date, the Department has not finalised its targeted review of the current guidelines, and as such the current guidelines remain in full effect, and the Planning Authority must be consistent with the standards set out in same.

IWEA requests again that Kildare County Council commits to a specific timeline post publication of any revisions to the guidelines to have a Wind Energy Strategy in place.

As part of the Draft CDP, Kildare County Council proposes changes to some of the sensitivity ratings of some of the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) to which IWEA raised some concerns with as part of its original submission. IWEA has stated that the effect of these increases in sensitivity in some parts of the county (particularly the Western Boglands LCA) have the potential to severely restrict the development of wind energy within certain areas of the County and will impact the delivery of Ireland's renewable energy targets and in turn could impact FDI and the exclusion of data centres within the County.

In this regard IWEA reiterates its original requests that:

1. *“The inclusion of increased landscape sensitivity ratings for certain areas of the county as outlined above be re-considered by Kildare County Council in consultation with key stakeholders in advance of the preparation of a Wind Energy Development Strategy for the county”* and
2. *“any such increase in landscape sensitivity ratings of an area should not arbitrarily preclude that area from wind energy development. Sites need to be assessed on their specific merits, with recognition required within the Wind Energy Development Strategy that certain areas, including those with existing designations, can on assessment, and with careful study and environmental assessment be suitable for sensitively sited renewable energy projects”.*

IWEA is of the opinion that the findings contained within Table 14.3 of the Draft CDP do not align with the overall sensitivity conclusions for particular LCAs in the county. IWEA requests that at a minimum an acknowledgement should be made by Kildare County Council that a “high” sensitivity landscape area does not necessarily preclude future wind farm development within that LCA.

IWEA notes that the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government recently issued a Direction in the matter of Section 31 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) on the Donegal CDP 2012-2018 Variation No. 2.

In the Minister's Direction on the proposed extensions to the ‘Not Favoured’ designation he recognised that Donegal County Council *‘failed to demonstrate sufficient and evidentially based reasoning relating to the nature and characteristics of Donegal for the above significant policy departures from guidelines on wind energy and therefore failed to comply with the provisions of Section 28 (1), Section 28 (1B) (b) and Section 31 (c) of the Act ... the Council will fail to maximise wind energy potential in Donegal which directly conflicts with the requirements of Section 5.2 of the Guidelines which states that development plans must secure the maximum potential from wind energy resources of the planning authority's area commensurate*

with supporting development that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development. IWEA submits that the comments above are relevant to the proposed reclassifications of some of the Landscape Character Area's (LCA) in the Draft Kildare CDP, as by reclassifying large parts of the county to "high" or "special" sensitivity in the proposed Landscape Character Assessment "*in the absence of sufficient and evidentially based reasoning*" may have the effect of making these areas unsuitable for wind farm development when Kildare County Council does complete its Wind Energy Strategy (WES) in the future. In IWEA's opinion the higher sensitivity rating conclusions are not supported and are in fact in conflict with some of the commentary in the Landscape Character Assessment.

Also, An Bord Pleanála has recently made a decision to refuse the proposed Maighne Wind Farm, the majority of the proposed wind farm was proposed to be located in the Western Boglands LCA. In its decision to refuse permission the Board stated that *the local landscape is one of considerable robustness wherein extensive cross-country views, while possible given the basin-like nature of the current and former bogland, are rarely achieved due to the extent and depth of barrier and boundary vegetation.*

In these circumstances it is difficult to understand the current proposal to re-classify the Western Boglands a "high" sensitivity area. Also as set out in the original submission by IWEA, in circumstances where there is a National Landscape Strategy being put in place it does not make sense to revise the existing Landscape Character Assessment at this point in time.

Conclusion

As stated in our original submission IWEA recommends against carrying out a revised Landscape Character Assessment at this point in time and an approach similar to the approach taken with implementing a WES should be taken, i.e. Kildare County Council should wait until after the National Landscape Strategy is in place. It is noteworthy that some Local Authorities have taken this approach recently, such as Kerry County Council. Furthermore in circumstances where the results of the proposed revised Landscape Character Assessment propose to increase the sensitivity of some of the LCAs in the county without clear justification (and in certain LCAs against recent ABP findings), which could result in large parts of Kildare being designated as low capacity for Wind, IWEA remains very concerned that Kildare County Council will not maximise the potential for Wind Energy Development in the County which is in accordance with National Policy.

IWEA reiterates its requests that:

1. *“The inclusion of increased landscape sensitivity ratings for certain areas of the county as outlined above be re-considered by Kildare County Council in consultation with key stakeholders in advance of the preparation of a Wind Energy Development Strategy for the county”.*
2. *“any such increase in landscape sensitivity ratings of an area should not arbitrarily preclude that area from wind energy development. Sites need to be assessed on their specific merits, with recognition required within the Wind Energy Development Strategy that certain areas, including those with existing designations, can on assessment, and with careful study and environmental assessment be suitable for sensitively sited renewable energy projects”.*

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and process, for your time in reviewing this submission and we look forward to continuing to engage with Kildare County Council in the future. We stand available to speak further on the contents of this submission and would welcome the opportunity to comment further as the Development Plan process progresses.

Yours sincerely,

*Sent electronically, bears no signature

Stella Burke
Assistant to the Head of Communications
Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA)