

Proposed Variation to the Existing County Development Plan in respect of a Wind Energy Framework

As a resident of Donegal, I am very concerned about the increase of wind energy developments within the County. These concerns include the location of potential developments, public consultation, and the lack of accumulative studies into the landscape, environment, and viability of proposed wind energy developments. None of these concerns are answered in the new Wind Energy Policy Framework.

Locational Issues

In terms of location, the relevant planning authorities need to be fully aware that windfarms are man-made industrial developments. Therefore, their suitability in terms of the landscape they are proposed to be located needs to be carefully considered. Donegal is highly prized for its beautiful landscapes. It is clear that any such man-made industrial development will detract from the natural beauty of these landscapes. Instead, these landscapes should be preserved and protected.

I believe the height of wind turbines needs to be carefully assessed in conjunction with the landscape they are proposed to be located, i.e., the overall elevation of turbine & hill combined and how this is imposed on other nearby hills. Turbines should be built with the intention of blending into the local landscape as much as possible, i.e., backdrop of sky behind. I think it is naïve to underestimate the size of wind turbines. My personal opinion is that no turbine should be bigger than 60m.

In consulting the newly proposed Wind Energy Map, I am very concerned. This map contains both 'Not normally permissible' and 'Open to consideration' areas which are intertwined next to each other throughout the County. If a windfarm is located in an 'open to consideration' area, it will obviously have a negative impact on an area of 'not normally permissible', due to the height and colour of the turbines. I personally believe that the large amounts of areas that are considered 'open to consideration' is very alarming. I believe that more areas especially all coastal areas should be considered 'not normally permissible'. Proposed windfarms should be located inland as much as possible. Perhaps new windfarms can be located next to established windfarms depending on suitability.

I believe that locational studies of proposed windfarms need to be assessed independently and without influence of the windfarm company in question. Local organisations and tourist bodies need to be consulted. This should concern not only landscape but the environment also. I believe there needs to be an independent environmental organisation that will independently assess all habitat areas.

Public Consultation

To date, there has been a complete lack of public consultation to the residents of Donegal concerning wind energy developments. I along with most other residents do not realise a windfarm has been in the planning process until it has been passed and the turbines erected.

Therefore, I believe it is highly important that the proposed Wind Energy Policy Framework contains policies which guarantee wide-ranging public consultation to local residents and communities. Consultations should be advertised extensively and give independent, factual information of the proposed development. This information should include, elevation, visibility, noise, impact on local

habitats, aviation lights, etc. Also included should be the benefits (if any) of such a development located in the local area. Consultations should not be influenced by the windfarm company and their representatives.

Accumulative impact studies, I believe are very important in terms of landscape, the environment and viability of wind energy developments.

In terms of landscape, no specific area of Donegal or household of Donegal should be influxed with windfarms to the point where turbines are located in every direction you look.

Environmentally, there needs to be accumulative impact studies of multiple wind farms impacting on hill dwelling fauna, i.e., deer, hare, bat, insect and bird species including migratory birds.

As well as landscape and environment, a separate accumulative study needs to be obtained in terms of the viability of new wind energy developments in relation to existing windfarms in Donegal. Viability studies need to assess population, supply vrs demand, grid capacity and infrastructure.

Residents of Donegal are currently seeing their electricity prices continue to rise exponentially, even though there has been a large increase of wind energy production in recent years. Most major towns in Donegal, i.e., Letterkenny, Buncrana, Killybegs and Donegal Town, have large windfarms located next to them. Surely these windfarms and other established windfarms should supply most of the electricity to most of the population of Donegal? (Depending on when the wind blows). One has to question building more windfarms especially in low populated areas. Does Donegal actually need more windfarms in terms of electricity demand of its population? Perhaps other renewable electricity sources are needed when the wind does not blow, i.e., solar and hydro.

Socially, to what benefit are new windfarms to the local population? One has to question, why should we residents sacrifice our landscapes, and local habitats and see no direct benefit? Reduced electricity prices to residents and communities should be at the forefront of the Wind Energy Policy Framework. The profitability of private windfarm companies needs to be questioned, especially when most households are struggling with energy bills. Therefore, cost / benefit analysis is key. To construct a windfarm without assessing its viability, I believe, would be over-riding public interest.

The Wind Energy Policy Framework needs to study and assess the grid capacity and infrastructure of electricity in Donegal. Furthermore, all major planning applications of renewable energy should contain their accompanying infrastructure to ensure viability. Why pass a major windfarm planning application when the grid is already at near/ full capacity in the area? The wind energy policy framework should be finalised only when it is guaranteed that the infrastructure is in place to ensure a proposed windfarm can function at its full capacity in conjunction with all other windfarms in the County. If there is an overflow of renewable energy in terms of local demand where does this electricity go? Can renewable electricity actually be transported to areas of high demand, i.e., the East of the Country? Is Donegal consulting councils in the North and working alongside the SONI of Northern Ireland?

All the above questions in relation to viability are essential questions that needs to considered and answered before a new wind energy policy framework is finalised. Issues of population, supply vrs demand, grid capacity and infrastructure need to be addressed.

Renewable energy should not be solely focused on wind energy. Perhaps Donegal can look to other countries such as Norway who generate most of their electricity through hydro power. Perhaps if every household in Donegal had solar panels, then this would generate electricity when the wind does not blow. Socially, this would bring electricity prices down per household. Additionally, people could monitor their own electricity production vrs consumption.

Overall, as a resident of Donegal I am extremely concerned about the new Wind Energy Policy Framework. Fundamentally, it is the lack of policies contained within. Before a new framework is finalised, it is essential that the viability of new wind energy developments is guaranteed. Thereafter, policies need to be in place which aim to protect landscapes, environmental habitats, and the people of Donegal from industrial development. It is my belief that Donegal has reached its limit on wind energy developments. Instead, Donegal County Council should look to a new framework which will diversify our renewable energy needs into solar and hydro. Crucially this new framework should prioritise the interests of local people over the interests of private corporations.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas McLaughlin