

Local residents speak out against wind farm

Angela Barncock 25/11/12

BY CAROLYN FARRAR

The daughter of one of the landowners who has agreed to lease lands to a proposed wind farm outside Glenties said she and her family will leave their home if the development is approved.

Cheryl Quinn, an observer in the appeal, was a witness for the Glenties Wind Farm Information Group on Tuesday during the fourth day of the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing into the application to build 22 wind turbines at six townlands near Glenties. She was one of 10 information group witnesses who made submissions on Tuesday.

"I will not subject my children to the well-documented hazards and dangers accused with this unsafe development," Mrs. Quinn said. She said there is at least one property in the area for sale as a direct result of its proximity to the proposed project.

The hearing into the development by Straboy Wind Energy Ltd. began last week, with submissions from experts called by the company, from Donegal County Council, from experts called by objectors and from some area residents. The hearing was called after 15 appeals were lodged against the council's decision in January to grant planning permission for 22 of the 25 turbines in the application.

Mrs. Quinn and her husband, an appellant, were born and raised in Glenties and moved to Straboy in 2005. They have three children.

"To have to displace them from their school and friends would have a serious impact on them educationally, socially and emotionally," Mrs. Quinn said. "To expose them, however, to sleep disorders and a host of other possible health-related issues as they approach important exams, which may dictate their future direction in life, is not an option for us." Their home is about 600 metres from the development.

Mrs. Quinn's voice broke with emotion when she said her eldest son, age 14, who plays for the local GAA club, CLG Naomh Connall, "has already declared that he will never play for any other club". She was also critical of Straboy Wind Energy's lack of consultation with the community on the project.

Denise Boyle, a traditional musician living in Malinbeg, Glenties, emphasised the musical heritage of the area and said her concern was that the Environmental Impact Assessment did not

include a proper and full assessment of the cultural landscape and its importance to Glenties.

Marcus Flannery, whose family's lands adjoin the proposed development, said the peat disposal area for the development lies at a higher level than his mother's house, and he had concerns regarding subsidence, slippage, and the protection of children who play in the area. He was also concerned about overhead wires that could come within 200 metres of a proposed site for a future house.

"My concern is that the electromagnetic radiation impact was not properly assessed and that alternative routes farther away from the group of houses in Straboy was not proposed," he said.

A local resident said he understood how landowners would be drawn by the rental payments for the turbines, but urged them to consider the objectors' positions. Christopher Nethercoat of Straboy, a retired business adviser, lives within 700 metres of two of the proposed turbines. He was not a member of the appellant groups.

"Wind farms sited near to communities and hamlets inevitably result in loss of amenity, health implications for nearby households, and they considerably diminish the value of the family home," said Mr. Nethercoat, who came

to Glenties with his family in 2006.

He said he was also concerned the wind farm could eventually destroy the character and appeal of Glenties, "as the inherent appeal of the area becomes spoiled by the presence and visual intrusion of huge industrial wind turbines on the edge of town".

Mr. Nethercoat also questioned the efficiency of wind energy and called for a joined-up energy policy, saying, "Nobody denies that fossil fuels will eventually run out and that we need to develop alternative energy strategies. But that is no argument for wind farms per se because there are plenty of far more efficient and cost-effective alternatives."

He said he favoured a bill sponsored by Sen. John Keady, which proposed a setback for turbines of 1.5 to 2 kilometres from private homes, "at least unless all the affected households have reached a financial accommodation with the developer". The bill also regulates the setback distance to the height of the turbines.

Mr. Nethercoat said he knows several of the landowners personally, and likes and respects them.

"One is a personal friend who has done me many kindnesses," he said. "So to them I want to say that everyone here understands how life-changing the

promised land rental incomes would be for the landowners and therefore why they may consequently feel aggrieved by the opposition to this particular scheme.

"But maybe they could in turn try to understand that most people don't want to live with a massive turbine within sight and sound of their back doors, ruining the peaceful enjoyment of their surroundings, possibly their health, probably making their homes unsaleable and even driving some into negative equity," he said.

However, Mr. Nethercoat said the farmers and landowners involved "are our friends and neighbours and personally I wish them all well, whatever the outcome of this hearing - even if this wind farm goes ahead."

Kate Evans, speaking on behalf of herself and Alun Evans, said that during their time at Corabeg Loch they have witnessed a significant rock fall and a large bog slippage on the ridge opposite their cottage, a ridge where several turbines are to be sited. "The couple, who strongly object to the council's decision to grant planning permission to the project, have owned land in the area for more than 30 years and spend a good deal of time there," Mrs. Evans said.

