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Noise study took place just days before oral hearing

BY DECLAN MAGEE IN GLENTIES

A baseline noise level study into a wind farm development was carried out less than a week before the oral hearing into the development started.

The oral hearing into the application to build 22 wind turbines at six townlands near Glenties heard yesterday that a 12-day assessment of noise levels was only completed last Wednesday and a survey was not carried out before planning permission was granted last January.

The oral 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.

The hearing into the development by Straboy Wind Energy got under way on Tuesday in Glenties. Submissions from the company outlined their case for the positive environmental impact and economic benefit of the project and its role in contributing to Ireland's national energy targets.

In its submission Donegal County Council refuted suggestions that there were procedural errors in the processing of the planning application.

Senior inspector with An Bord Pleanála, John Moore, said significant concerns were raised about the handling of the planning application.

Senior executive planner with the council, Frank Sweeney, said submissions and observations on a further information submission by the developer were returned as invalid as they did not have evidence that the third party had made a previous submission. The submissions were returned after having been initially accepted and the submissions could not be resubmitted as the decision to grant planning permission was made the same week.

One of the main concerns of the appellants is the impact of noise and Mr. Sweeney said the council had limited the noise levels to 43 decibels. The environmental impact statement indicated that three dwellings could experience noise levels above 45 decibel and that 16 dwellings could experience noise levels between 43 and 45 decibels. Information given by the developer to the oral hearing stated a busy general office has a noise level of 60 decibels.

Mr. Sweeney said three turbines were removed from the scheme because they created an unacceptable visual intrusion on the landscape.

Addressing concerns about the impact on the Irish language he said the council was not aware of any compelling evidence that an appropriately sited wind farm would result in population decline. He also said the council believed the wind farm would have no significant impact on tourism in the area.

One of the objectors to the scheme, Patricia Sharkey of the Gweebaraa Conservation Group, interrupted Mr. Sweeney on several occasions when he was making a submission.

The chair of the hearing, Mr. Moore, insisted that she stop interjecting, adding that she will be permitted to make a statement to the hearing at a later stage.

Evidence from appellants and observers is to be heard today (Thursday) and that evidence is expected to take at least three days.

A representative of the landowners on which the proposed wind farm would be built is also due to make a submission.

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