

# Windfarm company outline benefit of project at Glenties oral hearing

BY DECLAN MAGEE

The company behind a 22-turbine wind farm near Glenties says the project will not be visible from the town centre and will have negligible noise impacts on local residents and properties.

Straboy Wind energy outlined its case for the wind farm at six town-lands near Glenties over the first two days of the oral hearing in the town.

In 14 submissions to the An Bord Pleanála hearing, the company outlined the positive environmental impact and economic benefit of the project and its role in contributing to Ireland's national energy targets.

The main concerns of objectors to the project are the visual and noise impact of the wind farm on the town and the surrounding areas and the effect on the ecology of the area.

John Ward, a director and shareholder of Straboy Wind Energy, told the oral hearing that wind speeds in north and west Ireland are among the best in Europe.

He said Ireland's deployment of renewable energy generation is a key part of ensuring the country's economic re-emergence. He said the selection of the site was dictated by the consideration of what areas in Donegal are High Scenic Amenity Areas, Natura sites, what areas have sufficient wind speeds and what areas are outside the recommended 500 metre setback distance from dwellings.

He said the selection of the site "was not a random or ad hoc event" but was based on the wind speeds in the area, and the existence of a locally available grid and a 110km transmission network.

He said the wind farm will have "significant economic benefits" including local authority rates, land-owner payments, and community funding.

Addressing the visual impact of the project Mr Ward said there is quite a large separation of hinterland between the wind farm site and the town.

He said the wind farm, which would be located 1.5km north east of Glenties, will not be visible from the town centre and will "not in any way reduce or have any significant effects on the character of Glenties town".

The wind farm complies with all the provisions of the department of environment guidelines and there would be negligible accumulative effects with adjoining wind farms due to the large separation distances between the wind farms, he said.

On the issue of the effects to Glenveagh National Park, which is around 15km from the site, he said the visual effect would be negligible but the development might be visible from some higher locations in the park with limited or no accessibility.

An Bord Pleanála senior inspector and chair of the hearing, Kevin Moore, questioned Mr. Ward on the location of some of the photographs used in the presentation on visual impact and also questioned the assertion that from one location the wind farm will generate positive visual effects.

Aidan O'Neill, a town planning expert, said there would be no significant impact on habitats and species within the site and on the freshwater Pearl mussel population of the Owena River. No properties are located within 500 metres of any turbine and turbines are located well beyond the setback distance from the R250, he said.

He said the possibility of shadow flicker is extremely low and as the site is outside an especially High Scenic Amenity Area, it is capable of absorbing a wind energy development in principal.



A view of the public hearing at the Highland's Hotel into the proposed wind farms near Glenties. Photo Brian McDavid. 1510b0d112

He said the proposed location has respected "the scale and status of Glenties" and that it will not be visible from the town's Main Street.

On the issue of sound impact, noise and vibration consultant Brendan O'Reilly, said:

Noise experts carried out noise monitoring over 12 days at three locations. It emerged that the baseline study of noise levels was carried out only in September and October of this year and just finished last week - after planning permis-

sion had been granted.

Mr O'Reilly said proposed turbine for the project is one of the quietest on the market and in recent years there has been a significant reduction in the amount of noise produced by turbines.

Mr O'Reilly concluded that the noise and vibration from the wind farm would be below the threshold of audibility at 100 metres and is predicted to have a negligible effect on all residents and local properties.

The developer rejected claims

from appellants about the impact of the wind farm on the environment and ecology of the area. Most of the area is covered by blanket bog and Bernadette O'Connell, an environmental consultant, said the "significance of the impact on the bird community at Straboy would be low". She said surveys had detected three Red Grouse, which are listed as endangered with numbers in Ireland reported to be falling by 50 per cent

in recent years on the site.

Mr Richard Nairn, an environmental scientist, said the Red Grouse, which has been recorded as breeding on the site, is "not likely to be affected by the proposed development". He said experience in the UK shows the Red Grouse numbers recovered in the first year after the construction of wind farms.

Submissions have been made by the Golden Eagle Trust about the impact of the site on the bird which has been recently introduced to Donegal. The trust was also critical of the bird surveys carried out. Mr Nairn said there is no suitable nesting habitat for the Golden Eagle on the site. He said that while the Golden Eagles do fly over the site there is "no evidence of significant displacement of territorial birds by wind farms," nor is there evidence that the birds "are significantly affected by collision" with wind turbines.

Dan Keohane, an expert in geology, hydrogeology and surface water, said the main issue of concern is how the wind farm would affect slope stability and peat landscape risk. Large-scale peat landslides have occurred during the construction of wind farms in counties, Leitrim, Galway and Kerry in the last six years.

To avoid the risk of peat landslide, certain areas of the site were avoided due to slope, peat depth and peat quality.

Mr. Moore queried how the locations for the borrow pits, small quarries from which material is taken, were decided upon and how the quality of the rock was ascertained considering they are in a forested area.

Archaeologist Dermot Neils, said there were no protected archaeological, architectural or cultural heritage features within the proposed development area.

\*The hearing continues today.