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Laois CDP 2017-2023 – Draft Ministerial Direction
Forward Planning Department
Laois County Council
Aras an Chontae
James Fintan Lalor Avenue
Portlaoise
Co. Laois

Tuesday, 15 August 2017

Submitted by email to: devplan@laoiscoco.ie

Re: Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 – Draft Ministerial Direction

To whom it may concern,

The Irish Wind Energy Association welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in respect of the Draft Ministerial Direction (the Draft Direction; the Direction) on the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 (Laois CDP; the CDP).

IWEA is the leading renewable energy representative body in Ireland and as such has an active interest in the potential and capacity for renewable energy development, and in particular wind energy, in Ireland. IWEA works in a proactive and engaging manner with stakeholders in this area and as such feels it is both appropriate and important to make this submission.

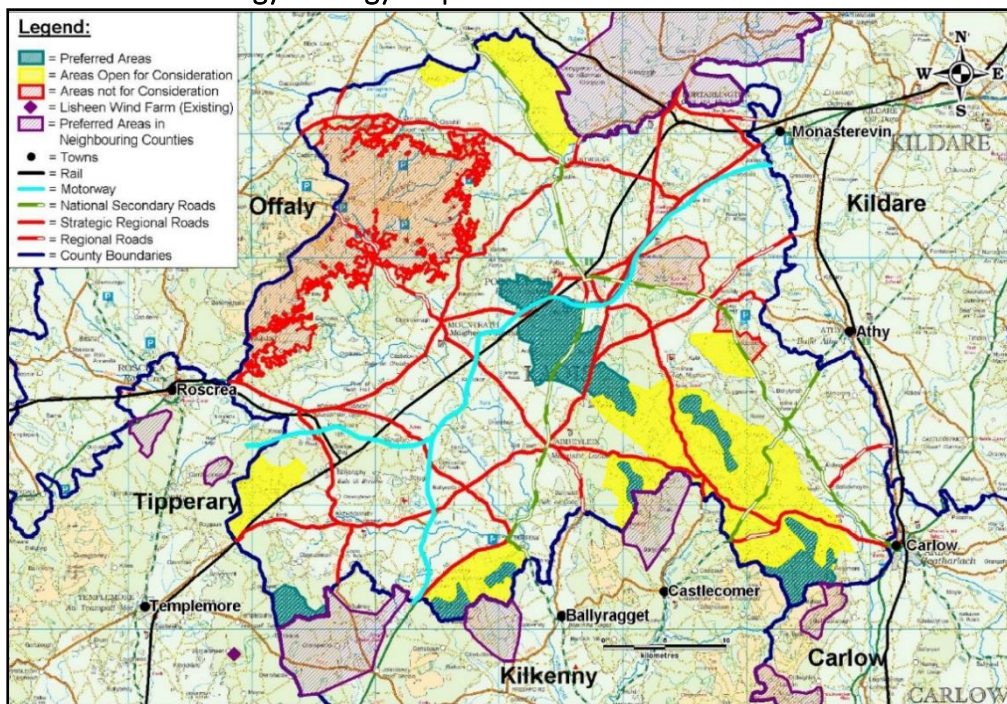
IWEA supports the Minister's intervention at this juncture in the Laois County Development Plan. As can be seen in previous submissions during the CDP process IWEA is extremely concerned about the decision of Laois County Council, and the stated motivation of some elected representatives, to effectively sterilise County Laois in respect of wind energy development. Aside from this being in contravention of national energy policy it is also unbecoming of a county such as Laois, and the people's locally elected representatives.

While IWEA commends the Minister's intervention as we believe it offers an opportunity to Laois County Council and its elected representatives to again examine the impact of what has been proposed in the CDP, we also feel the need to draw the Minister's attention to serious concerns industry has regarding the Map (the Revised Map) he has proposed as an alternative to the final adopted map. This map will substantially reduce the areas available for wind energy development in the county. In fact, if this map is adopted as a result of this process IWEA believes the Minister's intent in intervening in this matter, to demand respect

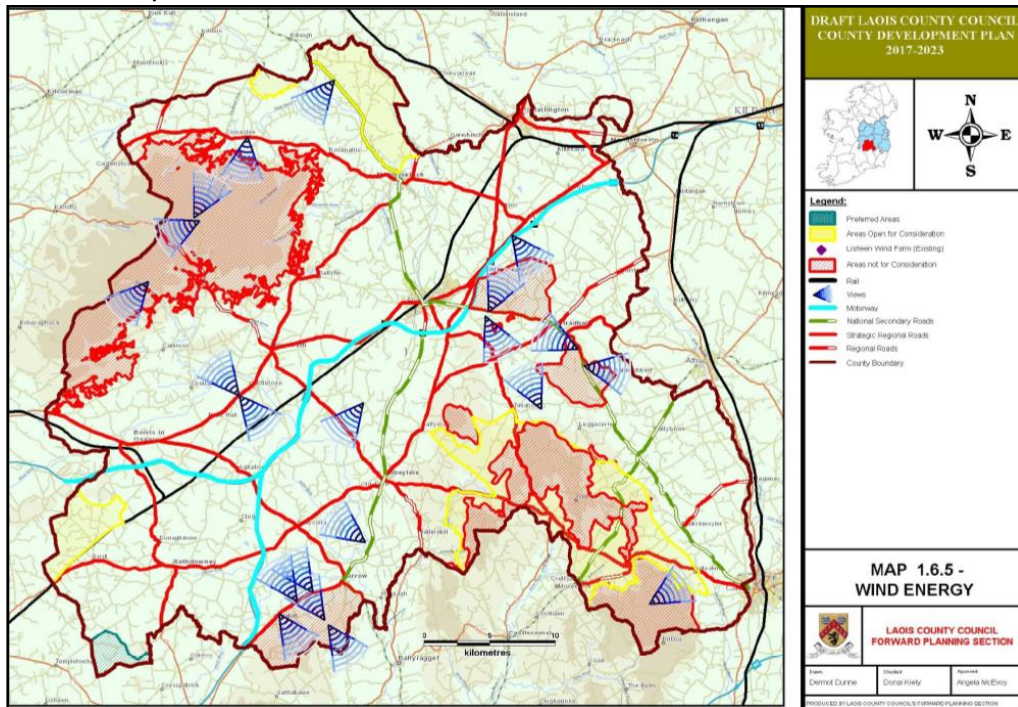
for and adherence to national guidelines ‘to secure the maximum potential from wind energy resources of the Planning Authority’s area’, will have the opposite impact. This map would render large parts of Laois with significant energy development potential as not suitable for consideration for wind farm development. Laois County Council has also not provided any scientific evidence to change the map that was included in the previous Wind Energy Strategy (WES) as part of the 2011 – 2017 County Development Plan (Previous CDP).

IWEA believes there is a clear downgrading in the classification of areas previously considered “Preferred” or “Open for Consideration” for wind energy development in the Revised Map. In relation to the Map, these proposals represent significant reclassifications that are presented without basis or evidence, for areas which have not experienced any landscape character changes, and for which the methodological approach to classifying these areas remains unchanged from the Previous Laois CDP and associated WES to the Current Laois CDP and associated WES. As such the Revised Map is not fit for adoption in its current form. The extent of the lands being reclassified from the previous County Development Plan are illustrated below.

Previous Wind Energy Strategy Map 2011 – 2017 CDP



Revised Map issued with Ministers Direction



It appears to IWEA that Laois County Council in drafting the Revised Map has effectively chosen to highlight areas above 225m contour line as unsuitable for wind farm development in the county despite there being no scientific evidence to support this in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment or in the wider Laois CDP.

IWEA is extremely concerned at the detrimental impact the adoption of the Revised Map into the CDP will have on the viability of not only future projects, but projects that are currently at advanced planning and pre-planning stages within Laois. IWEA supports the intention of the Minister, the Government and the Wind Energy Guidelines 2006 to secure *'the maximum potential from the wind energy resources of the planning authority's area'* and we do not believe the adoption the Revised Map is appropriate to achieve this.

The effect of the Revised Map will be to reclassify the areas of land with the best wind resource in the County (outside of the Slieve Bloom mountain range which has always been designated as an unsuitable area) to "Areas not for consideration" and to decrease the area of land in either an "Open to Consideration" or "Preferred area" zoning by greater than 50%¹ than what was zoned previously as illustrated in Appendix 1. Indeed, the one 'Preferred Area' remaining in the Revised Map, constitutes a minor 0.5% of the land area of the entire county and already hosts a six-wind turbine project.

¹ in 2011 – 2017 13.6% of the county was zoned "open for consideration" and 5.6% of the county was zoned a "a preferred area". In 2017 – 2023 8.5% of the county was zoned "open for consideration" and 0.46% of the county was zoned "a preferred area".

IWEA supports and respects the national energy development guidelines in place for wind farms. We note in the Minister’s Statement of Reasons appending his Draft Direction that decisions made by Laois County Council are *‘not consistent with relevant guidelines to planning authorities’*, *‘severely undermine and negate practical measures to adapt to climate change and reduce reliance on fossil fuels’*, and *‘effectively designate the vast bulk of the County as not open for considering wind energy proposals’*. In his intervention, the Minister has said Laois County Council has ignored or has not taken sufficient account of the submissions made by him in November 2016 and in May 2017. IWEA believes Laois County Council in its decision also erred by either overlooking or ignoring the potential investment opportunities that could be harnessed for Laois by adopting a CDP that effectively rules out wind energy development.

IWEA has profiled here one single, sample wind farm in Laois. One 30-megawatt wind farm could yield for Laois County Council a total €5.4m. This includes money paid in commercial rates, development contributions, levy for turbine height as well as community benefit. The community benefit figure of €1,000 per MW should be considered carefully. While this is an agreed minimum by IWEA members many wind farm developers, working in conjunction with local authorities who support wind energy development, have reached agreements for community benefit in excess that €1,000. As such IWEA believes the €5.4m is in fact a minimum that Laois County Council would receive from such a project.

PROFILE: 30MW wind farm in County Laois (10 turbines, 3MW each)

Commercial Rates (€200,000 per year for 20 years)	€4,000,000
Turbine height levy (€50,000 per turbine over 100 metres)	€500,000
Development Contribution to Local Authority (€10,000 per MW)	€300,000
MINIMUM community benefit contribution (€1,000 per MW per year for 20 years)	€600,000
TOTAL (FOR ONE WIND FARM)	€5,400,000

At this juncture IWEA would request that the Minister appoint an independent Planning Inspector to review the Laois CDP, the processes undertaken in arriving at its adoption and to ensure correct procedures in accordance with legislation and regulation has been adhered too.

IWEA wishes to impart upon the Minister and Laois County Council that it views the CDP as adopted as hostile to wind energy development, and unnecessarily so. Reputable and independent organisations such as the ESRI and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) have documented how wind power is reducing our carbon dioxide emissions and improved our energy security without increasing the cost of electricity for the Irish consumer.

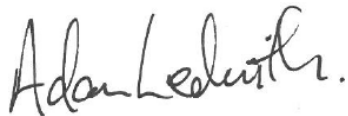
In fact, onshore wind in Ireland is one of the cheapest methods of electricity production available today.

If Laois County Council is permitted to adopt a CDP that restricts wind energy development without evidence-based reasoning and in contravention of national policy it will create a significant precedent and could have a detrimental impact on Ireland's energy policy as other Local Authorities could similarly apply arbitrary rules to constrain wind energy development. Indeed, if the Revised Map is to be adopted IWEA considers that it will be in contravention to the proper planning and sustainable development principle set out by the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government as recently as two weeks ago in Circular PL 5/2017 to all Local Authorities. See text below:

Members of local authorities are reminded of their statutory obligations under the planning code in this regard and that in making or varying development plans, they must address renewable energy related policies or objectives when considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Thank you in advance for considering our submission and IWEA wishes to offer the Council, the Department and/or the Minister the opportunity to discuss these matters further with a view to reaching an agreement that is satisfactory for all concerned.

Yours sincerely,



Adam Ledwith
Head of Communications and Public Affairs