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Naas, Co. Kildare

Senior Executive Officer,
Planning Department,
Kildare County Council,
Aras Chill Dara, Devoy Park,
Naas, Co. Kildare.

Submitted via online system.

13th July 2016

Dear Sir, Madam,

RE: Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 –Public Consultation

1.0 Introduction

The *Irish Wind Energy Association* (IWEA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the preparation of the new *Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (draft CDP 2017-2023)*. We have reviewed the strategic policies and objectives relating to wind energy development in the draft CDP 2017-2023. As the review will inform the vision, objectives and policies of the new plan for County Kildare from 2017, IWEA very much welcomes the opportunity to make a submission and looks forward to engaging constructively with Kildare County Council throughout the development plan process.

From our experience of the operation of the existing CDP 2011-2017 the IWEA has an insight into what has worked well in applying the current policies and objectives and how policy can be further developed to ensure that the planning system facilitates good planning, supports renewable energy for the good of the consumer and helps drive sustainable energy development, as well as helping meet our targets set by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCA).

This submission will set out the strategic context for wind energy development in Ireland before suggesting how specific local policies and objectives can help guide developers, provide an element of certainty and ensure that such developments are carried out at locations and in a way which accords to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2.0 Context & Strategic Objectives

The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) is Ireland's leading renewable energy representative body and as such, it has an active interest in the potential for sustainable energy. IWEA is committed to promoting the use of wind energy in Ireland and beyond, as an economically viable and environmentally sound alternative to other forms of non-renewable generation. IWEA also promotes awareness and understanding of wind power as a primary renewable energy resource. The magnitude of the Irish wind resource and the potential for its development has been appreciated for some years and there is a

growing appreciation for the amount of energy that can be delivered through wind, as in the first six months of 2016 alone, over 20% of our electricity generated has been met by indigenous wind energy.

With almost 25 years of wind energy development in Ireland since the first wind farm was opened in Mayo in 1992, we are proud that the Irish wind energy sector today

- Sees over 200 wind farms in operation with an installed capacity of almost 2500MW (Enough to power 1.59 million Irish homes) and providing approximately €16.5m annually in local authority rates and providing direct benefit schemes to support hundreds of community projects across the country.
- Employs over 3,400 people across Ireland and expects to have over 8,000 people in employment by 2020.
- Directly invested €3.9bn in Ireland's wind energy and will see a further €2.7bn invested to 2020.
- Is helping bring high profile investment to Ireland, for example with Apple and Facebook today developing €1bn worth of new clean energy Datacentres in Galway and Meath which will be powered 100% by Irish wind and renewables.
- Sees household companies such as Flahavans, IKEA, Glenisk, GSK, Muster Joinery and others owning their own wind turbines to power their businesses and cut their costs.
- Is a global leader, with Ireland acknowledged by the International Energy Agency (IEA) as being in the top three globally, behind only Denmark and Portugal for wind energy penetration into electricity.

Renewable energy development is a vital part of Ireland's strategy to tackle the major challenges facing us today – ensuring a secure supply of cost effective indigenous energy, allowing renewables to support inward investment, and meeting binding international climate goals. Wind energy, in particular has a key role to play in meeting these challenges. IWEA supports a strategic and transparent approach to proper planning and sustainable development.

At the outset, we all must acknowledge Ireland's need to support renewable energy, which also stems from its EU commitments. These include EU Directive 2009/28/EC on the Promotion of Renewable Energy Sources, which came into force in April 2009 and which establishes a binding target of 20% of overall EU energy consumption coming from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland's target under the Directive is for renewable resources to account for 16% of total energy consumption by 2020. Failure to meet these targets could result in EU sanctions. In line with these commitments, the Government also has a target for electricity from renewable energy sources (RES-E) of 40% by 2020.

The European Union is also now in the process of agreeing the framework for a further series of targets for renewable energy towards 2030. In October 2014, Ireland agreed to new EU 2030 targets, which seek a 40% reduction in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and a binding EU target for renewable energy of "at least 27%". As a significant proportion of new renewable capacity will likely be provided by on-shore wind, the 40% target is a significant challenge for the Irish wind industry as a whole. An approximate doubling of wind capacity will need to be installed on-shore in Ireland within the coming years if we are to meet our 2020 RES-E target. Ireland has also signed the Paris Climate Agreement with Irish ratification of this ambitious global agreement due shortly.

The expansion of the Irish wind industry will be an extremely positive economic development for the entire Country and, indeed, for Kildare County. The ready availability of a renewable energy supply source is increasingly becoming one of the core attractions for inward investment of large organisations such as

Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple. It will result in direct local investment, job creation, as well as increased local authority income through commercial rates and development contributions. At the same time, new wind energy development will also bring about a reduction of GHG emissions and help tackle global climate change.

IWEA recognise that a robust and efficient “plan lead” system is required in Kildare County, and that the County Development Plan will be key in the responsible development and the delivery of the wide reaching economic, social and environmental benefits of Kildare’s indigenous renewable resources. Relevant strategic policy documents, such as the new County Development Plan, must assist in enabling Ireland to develop its natural green energy resources and meet our EU2020 targets. IWEA members are involved in developing more than 85% of the wind farm capacity that is planned to be built from now to 2020 and we continue to contribute proactively and positively to the development of local, regional and national strategic planning.

3.0 Recommendations

IWEA wishes to commend Kildare County Council on the continued support of renewable energy development in the new draft CDP 2017 to 2023 which states the following as a Core Strategy;

“(Viii) Supporting, facilitating and promoting the sustainable development of renewable energy sources in the county;” (Section 2.2, Chapter 2 Core Strategy, draft CDP 2017-2023)

and which also contains the following positive statements on renewable energy;

“To adopt a positive approach to renewable energy proposals, having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, including community, environmental and landscape impacts and impacts on protected or designated heritage areas/structures.” (ER7, Section 8.5, Chapter 8 Energy & Communications, draft CDP 2017-2023)

“This Plan aims to support the development of indigenous renewable energy resources and the maximisation of electricity production in a manner that is in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.” (Section 8.3, Chapter 8 Energy & Communications, draft CDP 2017-2023)

The preparation of a clear strategy, targets and identification of geographical areas where wind energy development is encouraged or permissible is necessary to ensure clarity for all parties. This provides a greater degree of certainty for the wind industry and, indeed, for local residents and other local groups. It also provides clarity for the Planning Authority (and An Bord Pleanála) to facilitate the proper planning and sustainable development of areas. However these classifications should be based on clearly defined and measurable methodologies and provide a consistent approach to plan-led development.

IWEA notes the proposal contained in Section 8.6 of the Draft Plan, not to carry out a Wind Energy Development Strategy until such time as the results of the Government’s review of the current Wind Energy Development Guidelines (WEDGs) are published. **In the interest of providing clarity, IWEA requests that Kildare County Council states within the draft CDP that the current Wind Farm Planning Guidelines (2006) remain in place until any final revisions or updates on specific aspects of those**

Guidelines are signed into force by the Minister, and sets out a specified timeline, post the publication of the review of the WEDG's, to have a Wind Energy Strategy in place.

As a major stakeholder in the wind energy sector, IWEA have however a number of serious concerns with regard to the potentially detrimental impact that the proposed Kildare Draft County Development Plan (2017-2023) revised Landscape Sensitivity ratings (Section 4.10.4, Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (Appendix 6)) may have on the viability of not only future projects, but projects that are currently at an advanced pre-planning stage, should these alterations be adopted in their current form. The reasons for our concerns are outlined hereunder.

4.0 Specific Consultation Responses and Amendment Proposals

4.1 - Landscape Sensitivity

IWEA understand that the Proposed Variation to the Landscape Sensitivity Areas includes the proposal to replace the existing 'Landscape Sensitivity Areas Map (Ref. Kildare County Development Plan, 2011-2017, Map 14.2) with the Landscape Sensitivity Areas Map (Ref. Kildare Draft County Development Plan, 2017-2023, Figure 4.12) (See Appendix 1). More specifically, it is illustrated that, under the proposed variation, that the area to the north-west of the county known as the "Western Boglands" which is currently zoned as an area of "Medium Landscape Sensitivity" under the existing KCC CDP 2011-2017, has been re-classified as an area of "High Landscape Sensitivity" with the draft KCC CDP 2017-2023. Further areas have been re-classified from "High Landscape Sensitivity" to "Special Landscape Sensitivity" (Northern Hills & Chair of Kildare) (See Appendix 2).

IWEA supports the position that projects must be assessed on their own merits, subject to the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes. However, it is felt that with the re-classification of the landscape sensitivity ratings, in particular with regard to the Western Boglands, that these areas may be precluded from any wind energy development within the Kildare Wind Energy Strategy, once published.

IWEA would therefore request that further clarity as to how the proposed sensitivity ratings have been determined and also justify why certain LCA area's have increased in sensitivity from the current LCA in the current County Development Plan (2011-2017), as the reasons for these increases have not been provided. For example "Western Boglands" Landscape Character Area has been increased from "medium" sensitivity to "high" sensitivity. In circumstances where the description in the Draft LCA contains the wording that;

"The terrain has a high water table and it is badly drained, providing generally unstable and unproductive land"

and where the current LCA as part of the existing County Development Plan states;

"The major land use in the area is peat extraction due to the largely occurring natural resource in the area (i.e. mantled peatbogs)" and "Badly drained bogs and alluvial lands characterise the unit, which has remained unattractive to agricultural settlement. As a result, the area is thinly populated"

it is difficult to validate where this increase in sensitivity comes about.

As stated within Section 8.6 (Wind Energy) of the Kildare Draft CDP 2017-2023, with regard to landscape sensitivity the following is stated:

WE 3 To ensure that the assessment of wind energy development proposals will have regard to:

- **the sensitivities of the county's landscapes;**

IWEA strongly urge Kildare County Council to undertake further consultation with key stakeholders with regard to the appropriateness of the re-classification of landscape areas from that of "Medium to High", and the impact that this will have not only on future projects, but projects that are currently at an advanced pre-planning stage.

In addition the National Landscape Strategy (NLS) for the country of Ireland is currently being put in place by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA). Ireland has signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (ELC) which came into effect on 1 March 2004. The Convention has been ratified by thirty-eight countries. It obliges Ireland to implement policy changes and objectives concerning the management, protection and planning of the landscape. The National Landscape Strategy will be used to ensure compliance with the ELC and to establish principles for protecting and enhancing the landscape while positively managing its change. It will provide a high level policy framework to achieve balance between the management, planning and protection of the landscape by way of supporting actions. The NLS will be implemented on a National level and will compare all areas of the country and will ensure a consistent approach is taken across each county in relation to Landscape Character Assessment. **In the interest of consistency, IWEA request Kildare County Council to wait until the final National Landscape Strategy is published before making any changes to the current LCA for the county.**

4.2 Environmental Designations

IWEA welcomes a positive focus on sensitive and sustainable development. It is acknowledged that planning authorities pay particular attention to the zoning of environmentally sensitive lands, and discourage particular forms of development in locations deemed sensitive to adverse impacts from a particular type of development.

However, the blanket exclusion of all Natura 2000 areas to Wind farm Development runs contrary to "EU Guidance on wind energy development in accordance with the EU nature legislation" which state that:

*"The Habitats Directive does not, a priori, exclude wind farm developments in or adjacent to Natura 2000 sites. These need to be judged on a case by case basis."*¹

IWEA respectfully suggests that Kildare Co. Co. should take cognisance of the EU Commission's 2010 Guidance Document "Wind Energy Development and Natura 2000", as it provides clear guidance on how best to ensure that wind energy developments are compatible with the provisions of the Habitats and Birds Directives and provides clarifications on certain key aspects of this approval process. In doing so, it will allow consideration of each project based on its own merits, subject to the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment process.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/Wind_farms.pdf

5.0 Conclusion

Having examined the amendments to the draft Kildare CDP 2017-2023 Plan, IWEA welcomes and commends the continued positive approach Kildare County Council has taken to renewable energy development as one of their core strategies. We would reiterate that wind energy is the most established, cost effective for the consumer, readily available large-scale source of renewable energy currently available and that wind farms will play a key role in meeting the national 40% renewable electricity target.

IWEA however is of the opinion that the proposed changes within the Draft County Development Plan have the potential to severely restrict the development of wind energy within certain areas of the County and will impact the delivery of Ireland's renewable energy targets and in turn could impact FDI and the exclusion of data centres within the County.

Kildare is in a prime location, given its high voltage infrastructure and location, to compete for significant investment related to data centres. Climate action policies of big name tech firms such as Facebook, Apple and Microsoft dictate that these facilities must be powered 100% from renewable sources. In order to achieve this goal there must be a proximate availability of renewable electricity.

IWEA respectfully requests that inclusion of increased landscape sensitivity ratings for certain areas of the county as outlined above be re-considered by Kildare County Council in consultation with key stakeholders in advance of the preparation of a Wind Energy Development Strategy for the county.

IWEA also requests that any such increase in landscape sensitivity ratings of an area should not arbitrarily preclude that area from wind energy development. Sites need to be assessed on their specific merits, with recognition required within the Wind Energy Development Strategy that certain areas, including those with existing designations, can on assessment, and with careful study and environmental assessment be suitable for sensitively sited renewable energy projects.

We thank you once more for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and process, and for your time in reviewing this submission. We stand available to speak further on the contents of this submission and would welcome the opportunity to comment further as the Development Plan process progresses.

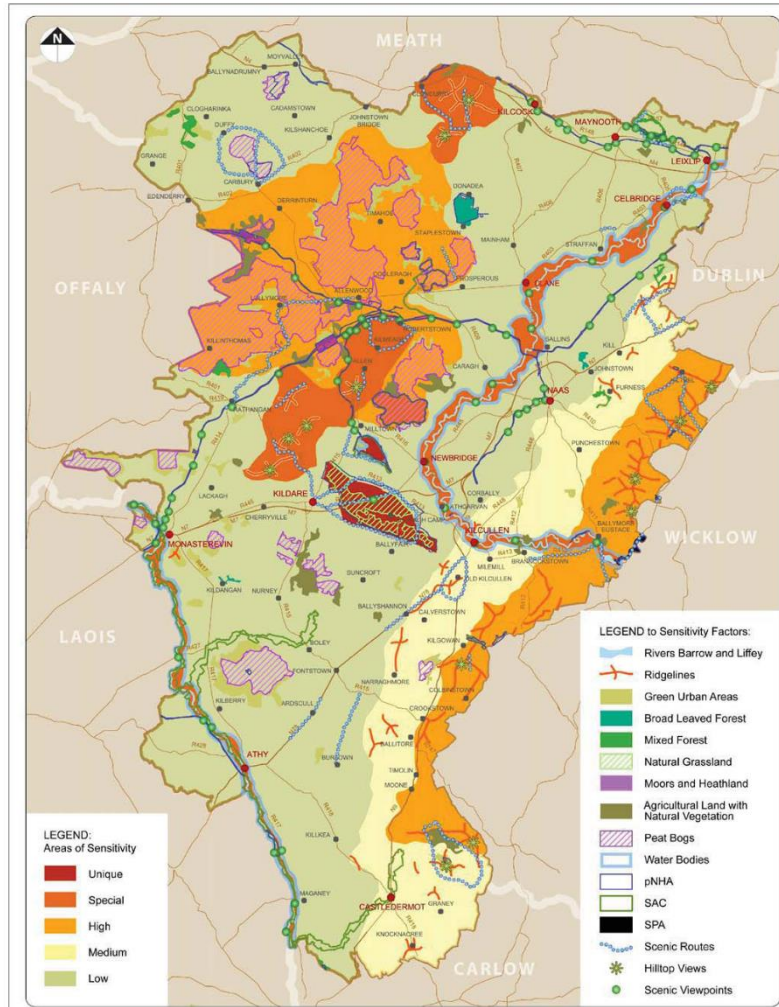
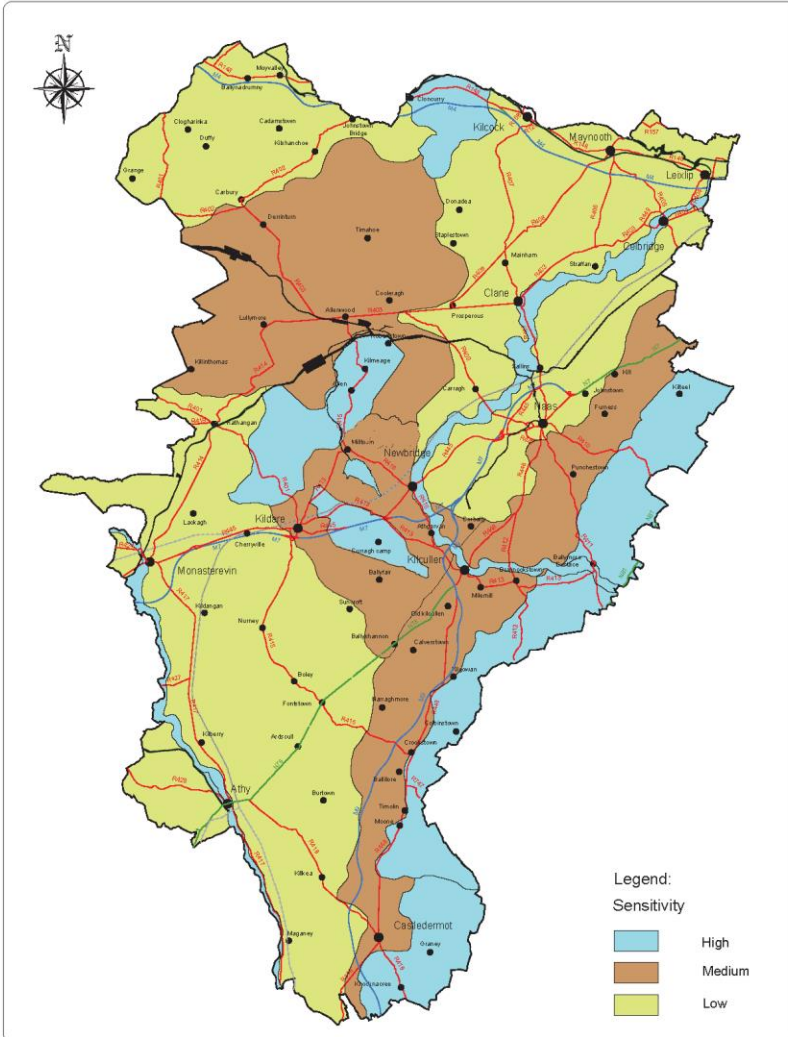
Yours sincerely,

*Sent electronically, bears no signature

Brian Dawson,
Head of Communications,
Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA)

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARISON OF CURRENT (2011-2017) WITH DRAFT PROPOSED (2017-2023) KILDARE CDP LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AREAS

Map 14.2 Landscape Sensitivity Areas



Kildare County Council
Planning & Economic
Development Department
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County Development Plan 2011 - 2017
Landscape Sensitivity Areas Map

Map Ref.: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 14.2
Date: 2-May-2011	Drawing No.: 200/09/466
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This drawing is to be read in conjunction with the written statement	



Kildare County Council
Planning & Economic
Development Department
Áras Chill Dara,
Naas, Co Kildare.

CDP 2017 - 2023
Landscape Sensitivity

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 4.1
Date: January 2018	Drawing No.: 200/09/096
	Drawn by: L.Lavelle
This drawing is to be read in conjunction with the written statement	

Figure 4.12 Sensitivity Ratings and Landscape Sensitivity Factors
Source: Kildare County Council (2015)

APPENDIX 2 : COMPARISON OF CURRENT (2011-2017) WITH DRAFT PROPOSED (2017-2023) KILDARE CDP LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

Map 14.1 Landscape Character Areas

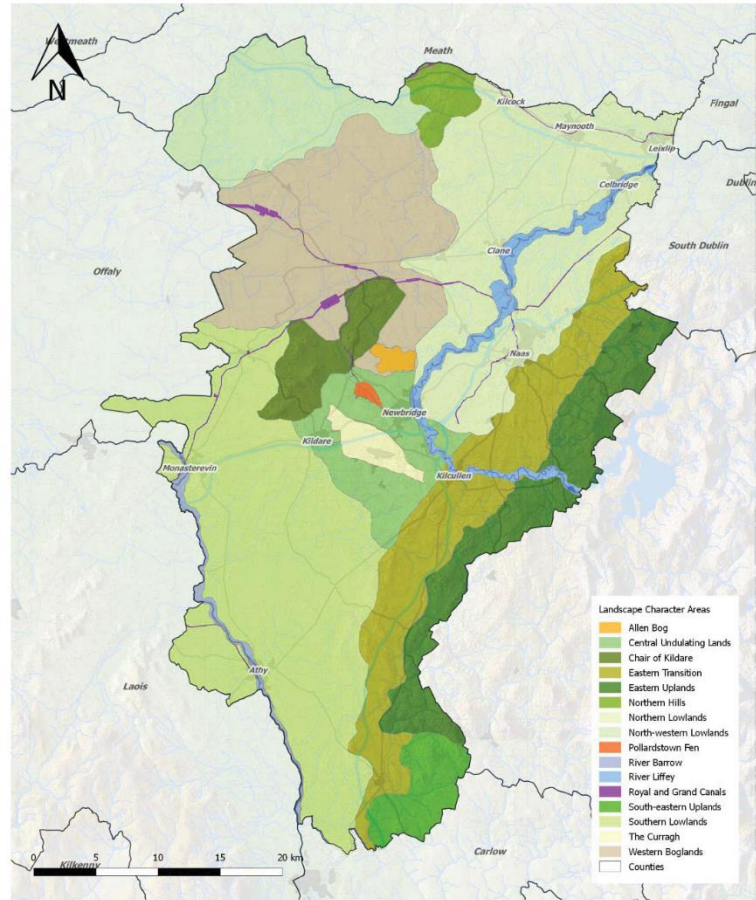


Figure 4.11 Landscape Category Map
Source: Kildare County Council (2015)