Proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm Project

Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Chapter 1: Introduction & Policy Context

March 2025

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

EIAR 1.1 The Location of The Ballynalacken Windfarm Project

The proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm site is located entirely within County Kilkenny on elevated lands equidistant between the towns of Ballyragget (4.3km) and Castlecomer (4.2km) in County Kilkenny, and 3.2km from the village of Ballinakill in County Laois.

The villages of Ballyouskill and Attanagh are located 3km and 3.9km respectively to the northwest of the windfarm.

EIAR 1.2 The Ballynalacken Windfarm Project Proposal

The proposal is to build a 12-turbine windfarm and ancillary works to be called Ballynalacken Windfarm Project and to connect the windfarm by underground cable to the EirGrid Ballyragget Substation. The windfarm will have an output capacity of c.50.4MW.

The proposed 12-turbine Ballynalacken Windfarm Project will comprise the following elements:

- Twelve (12) wind turbines with a rotor diameter of 117m. Regarding hub heights, two hub heights are proposed – 84m for one of the turbines and 96.5m for all other eleven turbines, thus giving an uppermost tip height of 142.5m for one turbine and 155m for all other turbines. Also, wind turbine associated works including foundations and hardstanding areas, windfarm roads and underground cabling within the site. The wind turbines and associated works will be located in Byrnesgrove; Commons; Ballymartin; Ballynalacken; Ballyoskill and Loughill townlands.
- A Windfarm Control Building located in Ballymartin townland.
- A Windfarm Substation (110kV) and associated access road located in Tinnalintan townland (Tinnalintan Substation).
- Underground cabling (4km in length) connecting the Windfarm Control Building to the Tinnalintan Substation through Ballymartin and Tinnalintan townlands.
- Underground grid connection (2km in length) from the Tinnalintan Substation to the existing EirGrid Ballyragget Substation through Tinnalintan, Coole and Moatpark townlands, and facilitating works in the EirGrid Substation.
- Ancillary works to facilitate the development including eleven (11) site entrances, one (1) 30m meteorological mast and associated access road, one (1) c.18m telecoms relay pole, felling of circa 21 hectares of commercial forestry plantation, site drainage network and sediment control systems, three (3) temporary construction compounds – two (2) in Ballymartin townland and one at Tinnalintan Substation, two (2) temporary borrow pits in Ballynalacken and Ballymartin townlands, long-term and temporary deposition areas for overburden and landscaping and reinstatement work.
- Road widening works in the vicinity of the windfarm site – temporary widening at two junctions in Ballymartin townland and permanent road widening by circa 1 meter on the L5845, L5840 and the L5846.
- A temporary hardcore Turbine Blade Transfer area, adjacent to the Kilkenny/Castlecomer road (N78) in Damerstown West townland, to transfer turbine blades onto a specialist blade lifter trailer which will facilitate transporting the turbine blades to the site, and

- A viewing/picnic area with parking for three cars; will be created on the windfarm side of Cromwell's Road in Ballynalacken townland. There will be cultural and natural heritage and windfarm information boards provided at viewing/picnic area.

See Figure 1.1: Ballynalacken Windfarm Project Location on Discovery Mapping at the end of this Chapter.

This EIA Report and all the other planning documents are also available on

www.ballynalackenwindfarmplanning.ie.

EIAR 1.3 The Ballynalacken Windfarm Project Promoters

Ecopower Developments and Art Generation, two Kilkenny based companies, have combined to form Rowanmere Limited with the purpose of jointly developing the proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm Project.

Ecopower Developments Limited is part of the Ecopower group of renewable energy companies, established in 1996, with a particular interest in on-shore wind energy developments. The company is wholly owned and managed in Ireland. Art Generation was founded in 2002 and also wholly owned and managed in Ireland and is experienced in developing windfarms throughout the country.

The combined windfarm development team is experienced in site investigations and site optimisation; preparation of planning applications; grid connection procurement; regulatory and policy compliance; financing and construction of windfarm projects. Our technical teams provide an asset management and windfarm operation and maintenance service throughout Ireland.

EIAR 1.4 Application to An Bord Pleanála

The Ballynalacken Windfarm Project, the proposed development, is described in Chapter 5 of this EIA Report. The planning application for the proposed development will be made directly to An Bord Pleanála. This is because, following the statutory consultation process between Rowanmere Limited and An Bord Pleanála (the Board), the Board concluded that the proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm Project constitutes a strategic infrastructure development for the purposes of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and therefore the company must apply directly to the Board for planning permission under section 37E of the Planning and Development Act.

Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation process, the Board's Inspector reasoned in their Report that the proposed development falls within the class of energy infrastructure relating to a wind power installation for energy production as set out in the Seventh Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), because the proposed windfarm exceeds 50MW output; and that the ongoing provision of sustainable renewable energy development is a national priority to ensure compliance with EU and national renewable energy targets and obligations and that such development includes windfarm development. The Inspector recognises that a development of the nature proposed, i.e. one which would expand the renewable energy infrastructure within the State to assist in meeting specified national obligations, would be of strategic economic importance to the State. Also, the Inspector concludes that the development is consistent with EU, national and regional policy which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve renewable energy production and contribute to the aim of achieving a low carbon economy. The Inspector considered that such development is supported in the Renewable Energy Directive, the Climate Action Plan, the National Renewable Energy Action Plan, the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, including Southern Regional Policy Objectives RPO 99 which seeks to support the sustainable development of renewable wind energy. Also, such development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of National Policy Objective 55 of the National

Planning Framework, which promotes renewable generation and generation at appropriate locations to meet national objectives towards achieving a low carbon economy by 2050. The Inspector also states that the proposed development would have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority, being located in County Kilkenny and in close proximity to the border with County Laois.

Following consideration of the submissions on file and of their Inspector's Report, the Board adopted the reasons in the Inspector's report and decided that the proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm Project would constitute strategic infrastructure. Decision reference ABP-312016-21. Therefore, the application will be made directly to An Bord Pleanála.

EIAR 1.5 Structure of the Planning Application

This planning application comprises a suite of application documents as detailed below in Table 1-1

Table 1-1: Documents accompanying this Planning Application

Volume No.	Document Title
Volume A	**PLANNING** • Planning Application Form • Cover Letter to An Bord Pleanála including Schedule of Documents • Notification to Kilkenny County Council including Schedule of Documents • Newspaper Notice Kilkenny People • Newspaper Notice Irish Independent • Site Notice and Site Notice Placement Location Map • Schedule of Prescribed Bodies notified pre application & Sample Notice • Letters of Consent from Landowners • EIA Portal Confirmation Notice
Volume B	**Planning Drawings Pack** including Schedule of Submitted Drawings
Volume C	**ENVIRONMENT** **Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)** • Non-Technical Summary of the EIAR • EIAR Chapters 1 to Chapter 20. The relevant Figures and Appendices follow each Chapter
Volume D	**Environmental Management Plan**
Volume E	**Appropriate Assessment Report including Figure and Appendices**

The planning application has been furnished in hard copy and soft copy format to An Bord Pleanála and Kilkenny County Council. All the application documents are also available on the dedicated website www.ballynalackenwindfarmplanning.ie

EIAR 1.6 Policy Context of the Proposed Development

The proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm Project is consistent with European and National Policy in relation to the Climate and Renewable Energy which seek to both reduce the damaging polluting effects of the generation of electricity and diversify from fossil fuel electricity generation to indigenous renewable sources of electricity generation.

At the European level, the Renewable Energy Directive (EU/2023/2413) entered into force on the 20th of November 2023. This revised directive sets an overall renewable energy target of at least 42.5% at European Union (EU) level by 2030 (Council Directive 2023/2413).

At the national level, the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) increased the 2030 onshore wind energy target from 8GW, set out in the Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP 21), to 9GW. This target has been incorporated unchanged into the Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) (Government of Ireland, 2024).

EIAR 1.6.1 European Policy

EIAR 1.6.1.1 Renewable Energy Directive

The Renewable Energy Directive (RED) is the legal framework for the development of renewable energy across all sectors of the EU economy, supporting clean energy cooperation across EU countries. Since the introduction of the RED in 2009, the RED has undergone several revisions, the most recent of which occurred in November 2023 (RED III), all pushing the renewable energy targets upwards, to combat increasing emissions. The RED sets the overall target for renewable energy in the EU.

RED III increases the EU wide renewable energy target from 32% set under the previous revision of the directive to at least 42.5%, with an ambition to reach 45% by 2030.

The proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm will support Ireland in reaching its legally binding obligations as an EU Member State of achieving at least 42.5% of energy from renewables by 2030 – electricity equates to approx. one-third of energy requirement and this continues to grow as electricity contributes to transportation also through EVs.

EIAR 1.6.1.2 Versailles Declaration and REPowerEU Emergency Plan

On 10th /11th March 2022, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the heads of state of the EU member States issued the Versailles Declaration[1]. The Declaration addressed reducing the EU's dependence on Russian energy supplies by phasing out the EU's dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible. One of the key actions to achieve this is by speeding up the development of renewables and the production of their key components, as well as streamlining authorisation procedures to accelerate energy projects. The participants invited the European Commission to propose a plan to this effect by the end of May 2022.

In response, the Commission adopted an emergency strategy to boost Europe's energy independence, called REPowerEU[2], which is based on two pillars 1) Diversifying gas supplies and 2) Accelerating renewables and energy efficiency. Relevant to this application, the Commission recognises the central role of wind energy: the EC wants 510 GW of wind energy by 2030, up from 190 GW today.

[1] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54773/20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3131

EIAR 1.6.1.3 Regulation (EU) 2022/2577

In July 2022 the European Council agreed ground-breaking political actions to achieve an orderly and co-ordinated reduction of gas consumption across the EU to prepare for the winter of 2022/2023. This agreement is intended to complement all the other actions taken to date in the context of REPowerEU, notably to diversify sources of gas supply, speed up the development of renewables and become more energy efficient.

In this context, on 22 December 2022 the Council adopted *Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 laying down a framework to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy*. This Regulation aimed to shorten and accelerate the permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects as well as for grid and infrastructure projects that are needed to integrate renewable energy into the electricity system. Also, the Regulation seeks to bring clarity on binding permitting deadlines, make it easier to repower wind farms, and ensure renewables are presumed to be of overriding public interest (Council Regulation 2022/2577). In December 2023 the Council of the EU, extended and amended Regulation 2022/2577 to the all permit-granting processes commenced up to the 30 June 2025.

It is clear from the urgency conveyed by the REPowerEU Emergency Plan that the accelerated deployment of renewable energy is crucial to mitigate the impact of the energy crisis, eliminate the EU's dependency on imported Russian gas and provide energy security to Member States.

The Ballynalacken Windfarm Project is compliant with Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 plans for indigenous European Union renewable electricity supplies as it is anticipated that Ballynalacken Windfarm will generate approx. 140 million kWh per annum of renewable generated electricity (RE-E) from the power in the wind.

EIAR 1.6.2 National Policy

EIAR 1.6.2.1 Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24)

The Irish government is creating and implementing policies and strategies to achieve its long-term goal of transitioning to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 and also to advance progress and action in global climate ambition in accordance with Ireland's commitments at the COP meetings (Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

A target of 70% electricity generation to come from renewable sources by 2030 was first set in the Government's White Paper 'Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015 – 2030', which aimed to transform Ireland to a low carbon economy (Ireland, Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources, 2015). A key measure of the Irish Government's 1st Climate Action Plan (2019) was to increase reliance on renewables for the generation of electricity (Renewable Electricity, RE-E) from 30% to 70% over the period 2021 to 2030, which required the addition of 12,000MW of RE-E capacity (Government of Ireland, 2019).

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was approved by Government on 23rd March 2021. The Act contains a National Climate Objective which commits the country to "pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of the year 2050" climate neutral status. Also, there is due to be a reduction of 51% in the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions within 10 years, which represents a significant challenge (Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021).

Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23), is the first to be prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, following the introduction in 2022 of economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. CAP23 set out how Ireland could accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development. Some key measures for the electricity sector in CAP23 were to;

- Increase the proportion of renewable electricity to 80% by 2030 by accelerating the delivery of onshore wind, offshore wind, and solar - and (relevant to the Ballynalacken Windfarm Project) deliver up to 9GW onshore wind (with 6GW by 2025) Note: There are currently 4GW of on-shore wind installed in Ireland, so the 2030 target represents more than a doubling of capacity.

- Align the relevant constituent elements of the planning and permitting system to support accelerated renewable energy development and ensure renewables will be considered to be in the overriding public interest.

According to CAP23 the key measures "will not just reduce our emissions from electricity, it will allow us to electrify other sectors such as transport and heat and reduce our emissions in these sectors too. Achieving further emissions reductions between now and 2030 requires a major step up in how we accelerate and increase the deployment of renewable energy to replace fossil fuels, deliver a flexible system to support renewables, and manage electricity demand" (Government of Ireland, 2022).

The current Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) is the third annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan. The Plan was approved by Government on 20 December 2023. According to the Gov.ie website[3], the Climate Action Plan 2024 builds upon CAP 2023 by refining and updating the measures and actions required to deliver the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. The Plan provides a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve Ireland's emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by no later than 2050, as committed to in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

EIAR 1.6.2.1.1 Ballynalacken Windfarm Project Contribution to Climate Action

Ballynalacken Windfarm is aligned with CAP24 and will contribute positively to the increasing imperative to ameliorate climate change by generating electricity without polluting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The value of this contribution is set out in the table below.

[3] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/79659-climate-action-plan-2024/

Table 1-1: Ballynalacken Windfarm Contribution to Climate Action

Predicted Production (kWh per annum) from Ballynalacken Windfarm		
140,000,000 kWh	Kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity per annum which will be generated by 12 No. turbines at Ballynalacken Windfarm	Source: WindFarmer wind resource assessment software calculation for 12 No. turbines at the Ballynalacken Windfarm site
CO_2e Offsets		
CO_2e offsets: Ballynalacken Windfarm will generate circa 140,000,000 kWh of RE-E every year without emitting greenhouse gases (GHG) or ash pollution and this will avoid an equal amount of electricity being generated from gas, coal or oil, which does emit GHG. The gases in a GHG bundle (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and ozone) are represented by CO_2e (Carbon Dioxide equivalent) when discussing offsets.		
Saving of **35,700 tonnes of CO_2e per annum**	CO_2e tonnes per annum that would otherwise be emitted if the kWh generated by Ballynalacken Windfarm, was instead generated by gas, coal and oil	Source: Based on the energy intensity of the Irish electricity generation mix of 255g CO_2/kWh (EPA, 2024)
Homes Supplied		
31,021 homes in Kilkenny and Laois per annum	Based on the average electricity use in Irish homes each year	Source: According to the SEAI Website the energy per dwelling statistics for 2022, homes in Ireland use an average of 4,513kWh electricity per annum per dwelling (SEAI, n.d. a)
Forestry carbon sequestration Equivalent		
Equivalent to **2,915 ha (29.15 square kilometres)** of forestry	Equivalent hectares of forestry required to sequester the same amount of CO_2e as the offsets from Ballynalacken Windfarm	Source: COFORD estimate that Irish forests sequester on average 3.36 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year (COFORD, 2006) 1 tonne of Carbon = 3.67 tonnes of CO_2. Therefore 1 hectare of Irish forest sequesters 12.33 tonnes of CO_2 per annum. The COFORD Council is a body appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to advise the Minister and his Department on issues related to the development of the forest sector in Ireland.
Diesel/Petrol Cars 'switching to Electric Car' Equivalent		
Equivalent to **19,820 cars sw**itch-ing to Electric Vehicle (EV)	Number of diesel/petrol cars that would emit the equivalent amount of CO_2e per annum as that offset by Ballynalacken Windfarm	Source: CO_2 emissions per kilometre for private cars was 114g CO_2/km in 2022 (SEAI, n.d. b). The average car in Ireland travels c.15,800km per annum (CSO, 2024) and therefore the average car in Ireland emits 1.8 tonnes of CO_2 per annum.

EIAR 1.6.2.2 National Planning Framework: Project Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published in February of 2018, forms the top tier of the national planning policy structure which establishes the policy context for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and local level development plans.

An overarching objective of the NPF is to foster a transition toward a low carbon, climate-resilient society, which reflects the policy ethos established at the European level of governance (e.g. climate change and renewable energy targets). In this regard, one of the key themes of the NPF is the realisation of an Ireland which has a secure and sustainable renewable energy supply and the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies. The NPF references the national Climate Policy Position which established the fundamental objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

The NPF emphasises that rural areas have a strong role to play in securing a sustainable renewable energy supply for the country and acknowledges that *"*rural areas have significantly contributed to the energy needs of the country and continue to do so". The NPF acknowledges that greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector must be reduced by at least 80% by 2050 when compared to 1990 levels, while ensuring a secure supply of energy exists (Government of Ireland, 2018).

It is clear that the provision of new renewable energy development, such as the proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm, is in line with the aims and objectives of the NPF which seeks to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy.

EIAR 1.6.2.3 National Development Plan 2021-2030

The National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 (NDP) sets out the major public investment projects identified by Government which are to play a significant role in addressing the opportunities and challenges faced by Ireland over the coming years such as housing, health, population growth, and most relevant to the proposed development, climate change. The NDP notes that the Irish Government is fully committed to playing its part to ensure that the worst climate change damage can be avoided, e.g. significant reductions in CO_2 and other greenhouse gas emissions, as assisted by the achievement of both European and national renewable energy targets.

One of the NDP's strategic climate priorities is the need for low-carbon, resilient electricity systems; specifically, the plan commits to increasing the share of renewable electricity up to 80% by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021). The proposed development will support the priorities of the NDP by providing RE-E from wind energy to the national grid, supporting the achievement of a low-carbon and resilient Irish electricity system.

EIAR 1.6.2.4 Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006

In 2006, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) published 'Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (WEDG) to provide statutory guidance for wind energy development, including consideration of environmental issues, such as noise and shadow flicker, design, siting, spatial extent and scale, cumulative effect and spacing, as well as the layout and height of wind turbines having regard to the landscape and other sensitivities. Planning authorities must have regard to the Guidelines on planning for wind energy through the development plan process and in determining applications for planning permission. The guidelines are intended to ensure a consistency of approach throughout the country in the identification of suitable locations for wind energy projects and in the treatment of planning applications for wind energy developments.

The Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 have been taken into account in the design of the Ballynalacken Windfarm and, as of the writing of this EIA Report, remain the current guidelines.

EIAR 1.6.2.5 Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2019

The review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 began in December 2013. Following consultation, a preferred draft approach was announced in 2017. The Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines were issued for public consultation in December 2019 and the consultation concluded in February 2020. These Draft Guidelines are still under review and until such time as the new guidelines are published, the 2006 guidelines remain the statutory policy guide in relation to all wind energy developments.

The Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2019 have been considered in the design of Ballynalacken Windfarm, to the extent practicable, given the draft status of these Guidelines.

EIAR 1.6.3 Regional Policy

EIAR 1.6.3.1 Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) was established in 2015, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region (Carlow, Clare, Cork, Kerry, Kilkenny, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford) came into effect on 31st January 2020. The RSES provides a long-term, strategic development framework for the future physical, economic and social development of the Southern Region. The RSES seeks to achieve balanced regional development and full implementation of Project Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework.

The RSES sets out a number of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) (Southern Regional Assembly, 2020) designed to facilitate greater integration of renewables into the national grid. The RSES notes that there is significant potential to use renewable energy across the Region to achieve climate change emission reduction targets. As such, the RSES supports renewable industries such as the proposed development.

- **RPO 87 (Low Carbon Energy Future):** The RSES is committed to the implementation of the Government's policy under Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-30 and Climate Action Plan 2019. It is an objective to promote change across business, public and residential sectors to achieve reduced GHG emissions in accordance with current and future national targets, improve energy efficiency and increase the use of renewable energy sources across the key sectors of electricity supply, heating, transport and agriculture.

- **RPO 99 (Renewable Wind Energy):** It is an objective to support the sustainable development of renewable wind energy (on shore and offshore) at appropriate locations and related grid infrastructure in the Region in compliance with national Wind Energy Guidelines.

The RSES sets out a number of infrastructural RPOs, relevant to the proposed development, which indicate that the Region is open to, and ready to invest in, renewable energy generation, including;

- **RPO 219 (New Energy Infrastructure):** It is an objective to support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process) to ensure the energy needs of future population and economic expansion within designated growth areas and across the Region can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner and that capacity is available at local and regional scale to meet future needs.

The RSES is ultimately supportive of the future growth of renewable energy technology in the region and sets a clear precedent to identify and capitalise on those opportunities associated with the transition to renewable energy generation.

EIAR 1.6.4 Local Policy - Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027

EIAR 1.6.4.1 Climate Action Policy in KCCDP (Chapter 2)

The Kilkenny City & County Development Plan (KCCDP) 2021-2027 Volume 1, provides for the development of indigenous energy resources, with an emphasis on renewable energy supplies. The Plan acknowledges the importance of renewable energy in reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and the contribution of renewable energy in achieving national and EU target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives have been incorporated into the policies of the KCCDP, to ensure that climate change action has been consistently integrated into the policy themes addressed by the KCCDP. Volume 1: Chapter 2 sets out a number of **Strategic Objectives** relating to Climate Action including the following:

> **2B** To support the implementation of the National Climate Action Plan and the National Climate Action Charter for Local Authorities, and to facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by embedding appropriate policies within the Development Plan.
>
> **2C** To promote, support and direct effective climate action policies and objectives that seek to improve climate outcomes across the settlement areas and communities of County Kilkenny helping to successfully contribute and deliver on the obligations of the State to transition to low carbon and climate resilient society.
>
> **2E** To ensure that the Development Plan transposes, supports and implements strategic objectives of the National Planning Framework and the Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to create an enabling local development framework that: (a) promotes and integrates important climate considerations in local development and the assessment of planning applications and (b) supports the practical implementation of national climate policy and targets to assist in the delivery of the national transition objective.

EIAR 1.6.4.2 Renewable Energy Policy in KCCDP (Chapter 11)

KCCDP Chapter 11: Renewable Energy sets out the policy context for all renewables, wherein it is acknowledged that Ireland and Kilkenny have excellent renewable energy (RE) resources, which will be a critical and growing component of Irish energy supply in the future.

It is the Strategic Aim of Chapter 11 to set a clear, ambitious target for renewable energy:

> **Chapter 11; Strategic Aim:** To generate 100% of electricity demand for the County through renewables by 2030 by promoting and facilitating all forms of renewable energies and energy efficiency improvements in a sustainable manner as a response to climate change in suitable locations, having due regard to natural and built heritage, biodiversity and residential amenities.

In this regard, it is Objective 11A to;

> **Objective 11A:** To support and facilitate the provision of energy in accordance with Ireland's transition to a low carbon energy future by means of the maintenance and upgrading of electricity and gas network grid infrastructure and by integrating renewable energy sources and ensuring our national and regional energy system remains safe, secure and ready to meet increased demand as the regional economy grows over the period of the Plan.

Ballynalacken Windfarm is compatible with the Strategic Aim to generate 100% of electricity demand from renewables by 2030 and supports the Objective to integrate renewable energy sources and ensuring our energy system remains safe, secure and ready to meet increased demand.

According to the Climate Change Advisory Council (Working Paper No. 16 May 2023) it is estimated that by 2030, County Kilkenny will use 633 Gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity. The latest figures from Wind Energy Ireland, show that Kilkenny generated 138GWh of electricity in 2024 from wind turbines located in the County (WEI website accessed 27/02/2025). Ballynalacken Windfarm will deliver an estimated 140GWh per annum of renewable electricity to assist in reaching the KCCDP Strategic Aim target and the Objective to increase production.

EIAR 1.6.4.2.1 KCCDP Locational Requirements for Wind Energy Developments

Section 11.5 of KCCDP relates to policy on Wind Energy, wherein it states that "All planning applications for wind energy developments shall be assessed against the DEHLG's Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006, (and any revisions thereof) and the County Council's Wind Strategy." The County Council's Wind Strategy comprises Appendix K. Wind Energy Development Strategy of the KCCDP.

Section 11.5.2 describes the development of that Wind Energy Development Strategy. In summary it states that the wind energy strategy has been developed for the current KCCDP building on the strategies from previous County Development Plans and having regard to Government policy generally and the *Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines*. It states that in accordance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines, the Planning Authority undertook a 4-step process for identifying suitable locations for wind energy generation.

The four steps are set out below;

1. Assess wind area potential using SEAI's Wind Atlas for Ireland.
2. Utilise a landscape character assessment and the potential sensitivity of the landscape for wind energy developments
3. Do a multi criteria or sieve analysis by overlaying the wind energy mapping and landscape Sensitivity
4. Integrate the information which derived from the previous steps with information regarding accessibility to electricity transmission and distribution grids.

EIAR 1.6.4.2.2 Kilkenny Wind Energy Development Strategy 2021 (Appendix K of KCCDP)

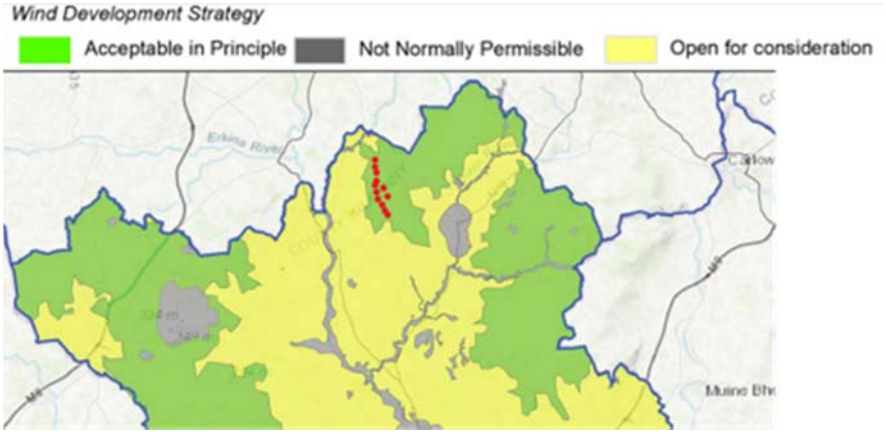
The Council's Wind Energy Development Strategy (Appendix K of the KCCDP) identifies 3 No. Strategy areas in the County, these are;

1. Acceptable in Principle
2. Open for Consideration
3. Not normally acceptable.

In summary, the Wind Energy Development Strategy identifies key areas where there is significant wind energy potential and grid connection capacity, where - subject to criteria such as design and landscape planning, natural heritage, environmental and amenity considerations - wind energy development will be either acceptable, open for consideration or not permissible. These strategy areas are shown on Figure 8: Wind Strategy Areas in Appendix K: Kilkenny Wind Energy Development Strategy 2021 of the KCCDP.

Ballynalacken Windfarm (red dots) is within an area on Figure 8 where wind energy developments are considered 'Acceptable in Principle' and where the Development Strategy states that Acceptable in Principle areas are "preferred area for wind energy development, characterised by high wind speeds, and no significant conflict with environmental designations or sensitivities".

Figure 8: Wind Development Strategy in KCCDP Appendix K: Kilkenny Wind Energy Development Strategy 2021



During the preliminary alternative site investigations carried out for the preferred location for Ballynalacken Windfarm and guided by the County's Wind Energy Development Strategy, it was established that the Ballynalacken Windfarm site was a suitable location because

1. The site on the Castlecomer Plateau Upland Area has an adequate wind resource for a viable windfarm due to the extent of the elevated area above surrounding topography.
2. The site is compatible with the County Landscape Assessment characterisation as an Upland Landscape Character Type where the relevant Development Management requirement, taking into account Landscape Character Sensitivity (Section 9.2.12.5 KCCDP) is "To facilitate, where appropriate, developments that have a functional and locational natural resource requirement to be situated on steep or elevated sites (e.g. reservoir, telecommunications or wind energy structures) with reference to the appropriate County strategies currently in place, and to ensure that any residual adverse visual impacts are minimised or mitigated".
3. The site does not include ecological sensitivities having no European Designated Sites within the site boundary i.e Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA).
4. There is adequate grid capacity in the vicinity i.e. at Ballyragget Eirgrid Substation.

EIAR 1.6.4.2.3 Renewable Energy Chapter 11 of KCCDP

In Chapter 11: Renewable Energy of the KCCDP, the potential for these Wind Energy Development Strategy areas to absorb a variety of projects, ranging from large scale wind farm projects to relatively small-scale wind energy. The policy approach is set out in Chapter 11: Table 11.3: Wind Energy Strategy Areas – policy approach;

Table 11.3: Wind Energy Strategy Areas – policy approach

Strategy Area Project Category	Acceptable in Principle	Open for Consideration	Not normally permissible
Individual Turbine	✓	✓	✓
Auto producer	✓	✓	✓
Small scale windfarm/ community led initiative	✓	✓	X
Large scale windfarm	✓	X	X

The Ballynalacken Windfarm is a large-scale windfarm.

The KCCDP Policy is expressed in Section 11.5.2

"(d) Large-Scale Wind Energy Developments (>5MW)

Large-scale wind energy developments will, in usual circumstances, only be considered in 'Acceptable in principle' areas. The rationale behind this policy is to minimise the visual impacts of such large-scale developments, in addition to effects on the environment of County Kilkenny as a whole, as well as to facilitate appropriate grid connections. These will be assessed in accordance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines."

Section 11.5.3 Development Management Guidance for the Wind Energy Development Strategy Areas includes "All planning applications for wind energy developments shall be assessed against the DEHLG's Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006, (and any subsequent update of these guidelines) and the County Council's Wind Strategy".

The location of Ballynalacken Windfarm is compatible with the County Council's Wind Energy Development Strategy as expressed in Appendix K of the KCCDP.

Also, according to the competent expert who prepared the landscape chapter for this EIA Report, the location of Ballynalacken Windfarm is also compatible with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006) which provide guidance on windfarm siting and design criteria for a number of different landscape types. The landscape expert considers that the site of the proposed Ballynalacken Windfarm development is within a landscape that is generally consistent with the 'Hilly and Flat Farmland' landscape type described in the Wind Energy Development Guidelines and therefore the associated guidance is applicable. Overall, the landscape expert considers that the Ballynalacken Windfarm design, particularly the linear ridgetop turbine arrangement, is fully in accordance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines guidance for this landscape setting. Even in respect of turbine height, which the guidance states would; *"tend not to be tall"* the location is acceptable because of the exception made for ridgelines of a relatively large scale and the fact that these are not tall turbines by current standards (Section EIAR 14.3.2.1 Landscape Chapter 14).

EIAR 1.6.4.2.4 Changes to the KCCDP 2021-2027 Wind Strategy Areas

The location of the wind energy development strategy areas are identified on Figure 11.4: Wind Strategy Areas of Chapter 11 and on Figure 8: Wind Strategy Areas in Appendix K: Kilkenny Wind Energy Development Strategy 2021 of the KCCDP.

The wind strategy areas, were modified prior to the adoption of the KCCDP, changing the status of certain areas in the south of the County from 'Acceptable in Principle' to 'Open for Consideration' or 'Not normally permissible'. The Ballynalacken Windfarm location strategy area designation was not changed – the area was Acceptable in Principle for wind energy developments in the Draft Plan and Wind Energy Development Strategy and in the finally Adopted Plan and Strategy.

The Kilkenny City & County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted, on 3rd of September 2021. On 15th October 2021, the Minister of State at the Department of the Housing, Local Government and Heritage, consequent to a recommendation made to him by the Office of the Planning Regulator notified Kilkenny County Council of his intention to issue a Direction to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Draft Direction states that those parts of the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027 Chapter 11 referred to in the notice shall not have effect namely Section 11.4 *Kilkenny Targets*, Section 11.5.1: *Current status and targets*; and Figure 11.4: *Wind Strategy Areas*. The final Ministerial Direction has not been issued to date (February 2025).

The locational compatibility of the Ballynalacken Windfarm with the policies of the KCCDP is not reliant on either Section 11.4; Section 11.5.1 or on the identification of the strategy areas on Figure 11.4. The strategy

areas are also identified on Figure 8 of the Kilkenny Wind Energy Development Strategy 2021 Appendix K of the adopted KCCDP.

In addition, the Ballynalacken Windfarm proposal is compatible with the Climate Change (Chapter 2) and Renewable Energy (Chapter 11) **Strategic Aims** of the KCCDP because the proposed windfarm renewable electricity generation of 140GWh per annum, will contribute to the delivery on the obligations of the State to transition to low carbon and climate resilient society and to promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energies in a sustainable manner.

EIAR 1.6.4.2.5 Assessment and Development Requirements for Wind Energy

Section 11.5.3. of KCCDP Chapter 11: Renewable Energy sets out a full suite of guidance on the requirements for wind energy development applications and developments in the County – Section 11.5.3.1 to Section 11.5.3.12 refers.

KCCDP Section 11.5.3.1 Environmental Assessments sets out the requirements for any EIA Report and Appropriate Assessment Reporting to be submitted with the application. Construction Environment Management Plans are also required to be submitted with the application.

Action: For the Ballynalacken Windfarm project, the EIA Report and Appropriate Assessment Reporting submitted with this application complies with the EIA Directive, the Habitat Directive and the Birds Directive. The assessments relate to all mandatory categories and includes both the windfarm and grid connection. Mitigation Measures are assessed as an integral part of the development. Construction Environment Management Plans have been submitted with the application including Site Drainage Drawings; Surveying, Monitoring & Mitigation Measures; Traffic Management Plan; Surface Water Management Plan; Waste Management Plan; Biodiversity Management Plan; Environmental Management Procedures and Emergency Response Procedures.

KCCDP Section 11.5.3.2 Pre-planning and public consultation states that consultation with the local population is required prior to the submission of the application.

Action: Pre-application consultations have been conducted with the local landowners and the local community. An Open Day was held in July 2024 and changes were made to the design in response to concerns raised (turbine size reduced). There was a mailshot with information on the proposal and details of the upcoming Open Day (July 24) sent to all houses within 1km of a turbine. A second mailshot was sent to these houses just prior to submission of the application in March 2025. A community website was also set up in July 2024, which contains details of the proposal in non-technical language and includes a viewport for inspection of the project photomontages and details of the community benefit scheme attaching to the proposed windfarm. This website has been updated with any changes. Contact telephone and email details are also provided on the website, for the Ballynalacken Windfarm Community Liaison Officer at Ecopower. See Chapter 4 of this EIA Report.

KCCDP Section 11.5.3.3 Impact on the Landscape describes the methodology to be used to estimate the potential for Landscape impact and states that all applications shall be accompanied by a Landscape Impact Assessment Report, as set out in Appendix 3 of the *Wind Energy Development Guidelines*, and any revisions thereof.

Action: The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) compiled in accordance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines and including photomontage visualisations and assessments from 32 No. Viewpoints. Consideration has been given to landscape sensitivity, visual presence, aesthetic impact and significance of the impact which is compatible with the methodology set out in Section 11.5.3.3. See Chapter 14 of this EIA Report.

KCCDP Section 11.5.3.4 Noise Impact Assessment and Noise Limit requires that noise modelling is submitted with any application for wind energy developments and that this modelling should include noise characteristics associated with both the wind turbines and any associated infrastructure such as transformers, sub-stations or any other ancillary equipment.

Action: Noise modelling has been carried out for the proposal including for ancillary structures. Mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design to ensure that the proposal complies with whatever limits are imposed by planning condition. See Chapter 10 of this EIA Report.

KCCDP Section 11.5.3.5 Shadow Flicker describes shadow flicker and requires that "a Shadow Flicker study detailing the outcome of computational modelling for the potential for shadow flicker from the development should accompany all planning applications for wind energy development and suitable mitigation will be required".

Action: A Shadow Flicker Study detailing the computational modelling for the potential for shadow flicker from the development and mitigation measures to control shadow flicker, are set out in Chapter 11 of this EIA Report.

Section 11.5.3.6 Natural Heritage requires that natural heritage (birds or rare flora, mammals, amphibians and fish) is assessed. Also, it states that registered thoroughbred stud farms are considered to be a noise and flicker sensitive properties.

Action: The impacts on natural heritage is assessed in Chapter 13 Biodiversity of the EIA Report. The nearest registered thoroughbred stud farm is over 20km from the windfarm site and as such well beyond the study area for noise and shadow flicker effect.

Section 11.5.3.7 Access to grid recommends that details of consultations with the electricity transmission operators regarding the nature and location of a proposed grid connection should be submitted as part of the pre-planning consultation.

Action: The developer consulted publicly available information from EirGrid sources on the national grid, to assess the grid connection capacity locally. Alternative grid connection location possibilities were investigated. Ballyragget Eirgrid Substation was chosen as the most suitable grid connection point (See Chapter 3 Alternatives Considered). An application cannot be made to Eirgrid for a grid connection agreement until a project has received planning approval. Eirgrid were contacted at the consultation stage but no reply was received (See Chapter 4: Consultations). The grid connection cabling to Ballyragget Substation was discussed with the Planning, Roads and Heritage sections of Kilkenny County Council during pre-application consultations. The grid connection point and connection options were also discussed with An Bord Pleanála during all 3 No. of the pre-application meetings.

Section 11.5.3.8 Proximity to Roads and Railways sets out a minimum set back distance of a blade tip height of the turbine plus 10%, from National and Regional roads and railways.

Action: The nearest Regional Road to a turbine is the Castlecomer/Ballyragget Road (R694). This road is 680m from the nearest turbine, T1 and therefore well beyond the limit (117m+11.7m = 128.7m).

Section 11.5.3.9 Proximity to power lines sets out the minimum clearance for all turbines and overhead transmission lines as the falling distance plus an additional flashover distance for the relevant voltage.

Action: Overhead lines are sparsely present throughout the construction works boundary, with local supply lines generally occuring along the road boundaries. The Moatpark-Loan 38kV and the Ballyragget-Coolnabacky 110kV overhead lines crosses the Project site. The separation distance between the turbines and these overhead lines is in compliance with Section 11.5.3.9 of the KCCDP and ESB Network rules.

Section 11.5.3.10 Interference with communication systems requires that licenced operators of communication systems, mobile phone operators and the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) be consulted prior to submission of the planning application.

Action: There is a telecoms masts facility adjacent to the site - at Ballyouskill. All of the operators from that site were consulted and the details of those consultations are set out in Appendix 16.2 Ballynalacken Wind Farm Telecommunications Impact Assessment Report. IAA were also consulted, and the results of that consultation are presented in Chapter 3 Consultations and Appendix.

Section 11.5.3.11 Appropriate Setback Distance to apply requires that a setback distance for visual amenity purposes, of 4-times the tip height should apply between a wind turbine and the nearest house, subject to a mandatory minimum setback of 500m. Discretion applies where the owner(s) and occupier(s) are agreeable, provided minimum noise requirements are met.

Action: There is no house located within 500m of a turbine in the Ballynalacken Windfarm scheme.

Section 11.5.3.12 Effects on Equine Facilities requires that the impacts on these facilities be assessed.

Action: The potential for significant impacts on local equine facilities is considered in Chapter 6 Land. In the absence of Irish Guidelines, the British Horse Society 2024 "Advice on Wind turbines and horses for planning officers and developers" refers, wherein it is advised that a separation distance of three times the turbine tip height from equestrian businesses be maintained (this is a repeat of the BHS advice in 2015). The nearest equestrian enterprise is to the east of the site and is at a distance greater than three times tip height from the turbines.

1.6.4.2.5.1	Conclusion to Assessment and Development requirements

It can be concluded that the Ballynalacken Windfarm application is compatible with the assessment and development requirements for wind energy as expressed in Section 11.5.3 of the KCCDP.

EIAR 1.6.5 Summary of Policy Context

The proposed development of a windfarm of c.50MW installed capacity is compatible with European and National Policy on the de-carbonisation of the electricity sector as part of Climate Action imperatives. The proposal is also compatible with European and National policy to develop indigenous, renewable sources of electricity generation in the context of security of supply independent of gas supply, particularly from Russia and other fossil fuel suppliers outside of the EU area.

Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027 is also supportive of climate action and development of renewable resources including wind energy, in suitable locations in the County. The proposed development location is identified as a suitable location for wind energy development in the Wind Energy Development Strategy for the County. The developer has also identified the site as suitable for the development of a windfarm due to elevation and scale, absence of EU Designated Sites, prospect of achieving an adequate separation distance from the nearest houses and national grid connection possibilities.

EIAR 1.6.6 Financial Contribution to Kilkenny Local Authority Area

EIAR 1.6.6.1 Landowner Payments

There are 26 No. landowners involved in the Ballynalacken Windfarm Project, most of whom live and farm in the locality and are generally the nearest residents to the turbines. Coillte Teo is also a landowner of 2 No. turbine sites. The windfarm company will lease the lands for turbine placements, cabling, electrical buildings, infrastructure, ancillary works, oversail areas and biodiversity protection area etc. **Lease payments totalling c.€700,000 will be paid annually to the landowners**.

EIAR 1.6.6.2 Community Benefit Scheme

The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications currently operates the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), to promote the generation of electricity from renewable sources. The Scheme is operated through a competitive auction for a price support for electricity sales from renewable energy generation plant. The Government is committed to holding RESS auctions at frequent intervals throughout the lifetime of the Scheme. Ballynalacken Windfarm can only apply to the Scheme once planning has been granted. The RESS 1, RESS 2, RESS 3 & RESS 4 schemes are completed. RESS 5 will likely be announced in the first half of 2025.

RESS scheme Terms & Conditions stipulate that windfarm projects selling electricity supported by RESS, are required to pay into a Community Benefit Fund an amount of €2 per megawatt hour (MW/hr) produced by the project, to be distributed in the locality annually. Based on an amount of €2 MW/hr and predicted production at the windfarm, the Ballynalacken Windfarm Community Benefit Fund would be c.€280,000 per annum. This annual community benefit payment will represent a substantial and sustainable benefit to the local community and community groups, for the lifetime of the windfarm.

A Ballynalacken Windfarm **Community Fund of c.€280,000 per annum** will be created based on the RESS rules, **irrespective of whether the windfarm participates in RESS or other Government price support scheme or not**.

EIAR 1.6.6.2.1 Distribution of the Community Benefit Fund

The Ballynalacken Windfarm Community Benefit Fund will be established and a local fund committee will be formed during the construction / commissioning phase. Once the windfarm is operational, the fund will be distributed annually, generally in accordance with RESS Terms & Conditions which are likely to reflect previous scheme conditions and in accordance with the local fund committee's decisions.

The Ballynalacken Windfarm Community Fund will support a near neighbour scheme of direct payments to local residents in the vicinity of the windfarm annually and will also provide sustainable funding for retrofit schemes, community enterprises, clubs and societies locally. It will be the responsibility of those operating the fund to administer the fund in a manner that will predominantly benefit the area local to Ballynalacken Windfarm to ensure that those most impacted by the windfarm in the locality, receive the greatest benefit.

EIAR 1.6.6.3 Commercial Rates to Kilkenny County Council

The basis of the Commercial Rates, paid to the Local Authority, are calculated by the Valuations Office taking into consideration the capacity factor of the windfarm and the electricity generation prediction per annum for the site. The Annual Rateable Valuation (ARV) set by Kilkenny County Council is then applied to the Valuation Office calculation and the annual commercial rates payable by the windfarm to Kilkenny County Council is set.

The capacity factor at Ballynalacken Windfarm is predicted to be 30% with electricity production of circa 140 million kWh per annum. Based on current Valuations Office rates and Kilkenny County Council ARV, this production is predicted to result in **commercial rates payments to Kilkenny County Council of c.€800,000 per annum,** for the lifetime of the windfarm delivering a positive benefit to the people of County Kilkenny.

EIAR 1.7 Reference List for Introduction

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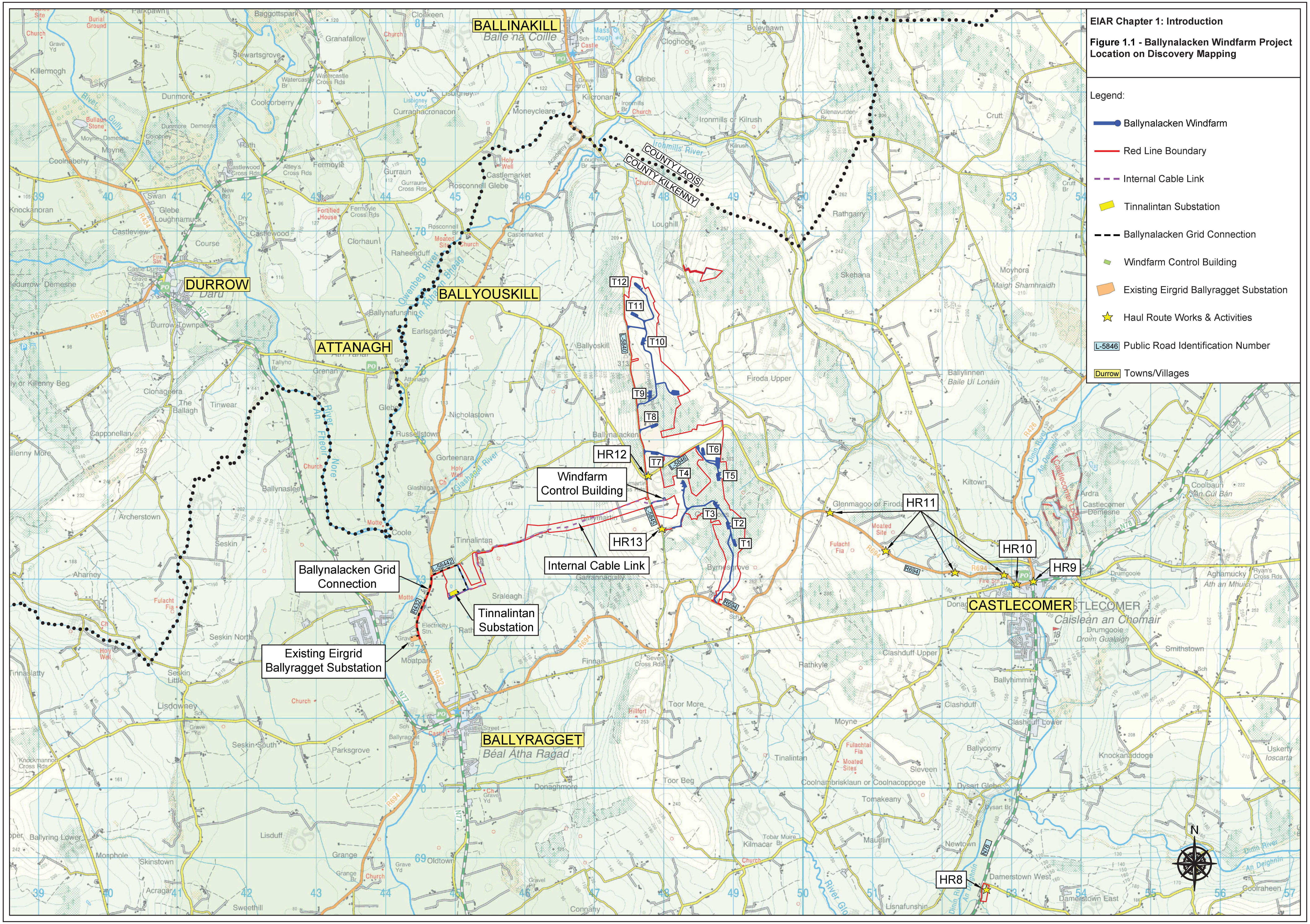
EIAR 1.1 List of Figures for Introduction & Policy Context

FIGURES (overleaf)

Figures for Introduction & Policy Context


Legend:
Ballynalacken Windfarm
Red Line Boundary
Internal Cable Link
Tinnalintan Substation
Ballynalacken Grid Connection
Windfarm Control Building
Existing Eirgrid Ballyragget Substation
Haul Route Works & Activities
L-5846 Public Road Identification Number
Durrow Towns/Villages
BALLINAKILL
DURROW
BALLYOUSKILL
ATTANAGH
CASTLECOMER
BALLYRAGGET
COUNTY LAOIS
COUNTY KILKENNY
T1
T2
T3
T4
T5
T6
T7
T8
T9
T10
T11
T12
HR8
HR9
HR10
HR11
HR12
HR13
Windfarm Control Building
Internal Cable Link
Ballynalacken Grid Connection
Tinnalintan Substation
Existing Eirgrid Ballyragget Substation
N

EIAR Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1.1 - Ballynalacken Windfarm Project Location on Discovery Mapping