



Chapter 2: Scoping and Key Issues

Coolglass Wind Farm Vol. 2 EIAR

Coolglass Wind Farm Limited

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABP	An Bord Pleanála
CAP	Climate Action Plan
CDP	County Development Plan
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CGSs	County Geological Site
CLO	Community Liaison Office
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
EMF	Electromagnetic Frequency
EMP	Emergency Response Plan
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
FWD	Falling Weight Deflectometer
IFI	Inland Fisheries Ireland
IR	Infra-Red
IW	Irish Water
LCC	Laois County Council
LCDP	Laois County Development Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO's	Non-Governmental Organisations
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
NM	Nautical Miles
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
PCE	Pre Connection Enquiry
PCS	Pavement Condition Survey
PSCI	Pavement Condition Survey
PSO	Public Service Obligation levy
PWS	Public Water Scheme
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SLR	SLR Consulting Limited
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage Scheme
SWMP	Surface Water Management Plan
VCR	Virtual Consultation Room



2.0 Scoping, Consultation and Key Issues

2.1 Introduction

Consultation is a key part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This chapter describes the consultation process and EIAR scoping that was undertaken to identify key effects from the Proposed Development to be included in the EIAR. The consultation process carried out for the Proposed Development site was lengthy, detailed, and thorough. Several points and submissions were made by prescribed bodies and other 3rd parties as part of the consultation process which have informed the design of the Proposed Development and the approach to this EIAR.

This chapter describes the consultation and scoping process undertaken by the Applicant and does not refer to any separate statutory consultation process that will be carried out by An Bord Pleanála nor any formal scoping opinion from An Bord Pleanála pursuant to section 37D of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Within this consultation process, importance has been taken from the Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland – Guidelines for Community Engagement published in 2016 by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. This states that

“This Code of Good Practice is intended to ensure that wind energy development in Ireland is undertaken in observance with the best industry practices, and with the full engagement of communities around the country”.

The applicant complied with the provisions of this Code of Practice throughout the pre-planning process and followed good practice for in engaging with communities as set out in this Guidance.

2.1.1 Statement of Authority

- This chapter has been prepared by Crystal Leiker, BA Soc Sc, M.Plan, MIPI and Edward Goulding BA MSc.
- Crystal is a chartered planner and has eight years’ experience in project management, EIA coordination, planning for large scale infrastructure and renewable energy projects. She has 5 years of experience in writing EIA chapters including population and human health chapters for renewable energy projects.
- Edward is a graduate planner with SLR consulting and has 2 years’ post qualification experience in scoping and consultation preparation for population and human health chapters.

2.2 Scoping and Key Consultees

The purpose of the EIA scoping process is to identify the key points and issues which are likely to be important during the environmental impact assessment (EIA) of a project and to eliminate those that are not. The scoping process identifies sources or causes of potential environmental effects, the pathways by which the effects can happen, and the sensitive receptors which are likely to be affected. It defines the appropriate level of detail for the information to be provided in the EIAR so as to enable the competent authority to reach a reasoned conclusion on the significant effects on the environment of the Proposed Development, taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment



A consultation process was carried out with respect to this EIAR in order to inform the assessment of likely significant environmental effects. A scoping request letter and scoping report providing a description of the Proposed Development, preliminary table of contents of the EIAR and outline of the methodology for assessment was distributed to consultees on the 7th of June 2022.

The recipients included Local Authorities, Government Departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), interested parties and key stakeholders. Consultees were invited to contribute to the Scope of the EIAR by suggesting baseline data, survey methodologies and potential impacts that should be considered as part of the impact assessment process and as part of preparing the EIAR.

Table 2-1 details the list of consultees who were issued a copy of the scoping document.

Table 2-1 List of Consultees

Type of Stakeholder	Body Department
Kilkenny County Council	Planning Department
	Roads Department
	Environment Department
	Heritage Officer
Carlow County Council	Planning Department
	Roads Department
	Environment Department
	Heritage Officer
Laois County Council	Planning Department
	Roads Department
	Environment Department
	Heritage Officer
Government Departments	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
	Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs – Development Applications Unit (Nature Conservation)
	Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs – Development Applications Unit (National Monuments Service)
	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
	Department of Defence
	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)	



Type of Stakeholder	Body Department
Prescribed Bodies, NGOs and Stakeholders	An Taisce
	Arra Communications
	Bat Conservation Ireland
	Birdwatch Ireland
	Commission for Energy Regulation
	Development Applications Unit, NPWS
	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
	Echo IT Limited
	EPA
	Fáilte Ireland
	Gas Networks Ireland
	Geological Survey of Ireland
	Health Service Executive
	Iarnroid Eireann
	Inland Fisheries Ireland
	Irish Farmers Association
	Irish Peatland Conservation Council
	Irish Parachute Club
	Irish Raptor Group
	Irish Red Grouse Association
	Irish Sports Council
	Irish Water
	Irish Wildlife Trust
	National Trails Office (Now Sport Ireland Outdoors)
	Office of Public Works
	South Eastern River Basin District
	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
	Teagasc
	TETRA Ireland Ltd.
	The Arts Council
The Heritage Council	
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	



Type of Stakeholder	Body Department
	Údarás na Gaeltachta
	Waterways Ireland
Telecommunication / Aviation	Arra Communications
	Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
	BT Communications Ireland Ltd
	Commission for Communications Regulation
	Digiweb Dublin Offices and Data Centre
	Dublin Airport Authority
	Eir
	ESB Telecoms
	Irish Aviation Authority

2.3 Consultation with Key Stakeholders

2.3.1 Pre application Consultation with Laois County Council

A pre-application consultation meeting was held with the Applicant and Laois County Council (LCC) on Thursday the 26th of May 2022.

During the meeting LCC representatives focused on three topics: roads, water supply, heritage, landscape and visual impact.

LCC requested that no damage occur to the existing road network and that pre- and post-condition surveys as well as surveys of bridges and culverts as per the 2007 Laois Road Guidelines would be required to ensure that the road was reinstated to its previous level of maintenance following the completion of the construction phase. In addition, the LCC requested that drainage from roads is maintained.

In relation to water supply, the Council requested that due regard was had for Kyle Spring and Swan public water supplies in the siting of infrastructure and in the assessment of the EIAR.

Regarding heritage and viewpoints, LCC requested that the following protected views be included in the EIAR:

- 002 Windy Gap at the N80
- 008 Rock of Dunamase

These viewpoints are assessed as part of Chapter 7 of this EIAR.

Furthermore, it was noted by LCC that the town of Timahoe was considered a heritage town and that the siting of infrastructure should have due regard for the setting of this town, including its round tower. LCC also noted some concern relating to the tree lined avenue (R426) on the northern approach to the town and how the proposed turbine delivery route might impact upon it. These issues are addressed in Chapters 11 and Technical Appendix 12.1 Turbine Delivery Route Assessment report found in Volume III of this EIAR. Other issues raised included development plan policy constraints with respect to areas deemed open to consideration for wind energy development and the need for the



applicant to provide a community benefit fund for the surrounding area. These points are addressed in the Planning Report submitted with this application.

2.3.2 Ongoing Engagement with Laois County Council

Engagement with LCC was ongoing throughout the assessment of the Proposed Development, from the pre-application stage to the second pre-application meeting with An Bord Pleanála. Such engagement focused on the potential impact on roads in the surrounding area.

A follow up meeting with the LCC Roads Department occurred on 18th January 2023 to discuss the turbine delivery route and other roads related concerns outlined from the initial pre-application meeting. The consultants presented the proposed turbine delivery route to the Council and focused in on the nodes along the route where potential works could be required to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure.

Key points raised at this meeting included:

- Confirmation of site access points
- The process for obtaining a letter of consent from LCC for lands within their ownership which would require temporary construction works to facilitate the turbine delivery route.
- Considerations of old stone bridges and culverts within any load assessments undertaken
- The requirement by LCC to undertake a pavement surface condition index (PSCI) survey to identify any structural issues which would require a full condition survey.
- Concerns were raised about the Option 2 Cable Route. The chief concern was that, should this cable route proceed, it does not enter the R426 south of Timahoe given some significant recent upgrade works on this stretch of road. This concern was noted by the applicant and consultant who confirmed to LCC Roads department that the cable route and recreational amenity trail would be subject to a separate planning process.
- A request for a site visit to observe the turbine delivery route was requested by the applicant which was facilitated by LCC.

Following this second meeting, a follow up site visit with the LCC Roads Department was undertaken on 17th February 2023 to examine the proposed turbine delivery route. The applicant and consultant project manager attended with the project roads engineer and two engineers from the Roads Department. During this site visit, key considerations with the Council were discussed, such as the tree lined avenue on the north approach to Timahoe. The consultant roads engineer was able to demonstrate that no removal or works would be required in this avenue, noting that tractors with several layers of hay bales are able to pass under these trees with no ill effects- such vehicles being of similar height to turbine and substation component delivery. No concerns were highlighted by the Council roads engineers at the end of this site visit and the route was generally accepted (see Chapter 12 of this EIAR). A letter of consent for temporary works across the proposed turbine delivery route was issued shortly following the conclusion of this site visit.



2.3.3 Pre-application consultation meetings with An Bord Pleanála

The first pre-application consultation meeting was held on Thursday the 16th of June 2022 with An Bord Pleanála (ABP ref. 313375-22). During the meeting, a number of items were discussed following the presentation of the overall Project and Proposed Development to the Board.

- It was recommended by the Board's representatives that clarity be provided with regards to the LCC renewable energy strategy. This has been set out in the Planning Statement accompanying this planning application
- The Board's representatives advised that any planning application and studies should be cognisant of effects on tourism and amenities of the area. This has been addressed in Chapter 5 Population and Human Health, and in Chapter 11 Archaeology and Cultural Heritage.
- The Board's representatives also advised that effects on hydrological regimes in the area should be assessed robustly and that engagement with the NPWS on this issue would be recommended. This has been addressed in Chapter 9 Water and in Chapter 15 Biodiversity

With regard to stakeholder consultations, the Board enquired as to any engagements with the traffic department of the local authority. The applicants advised that pre-application engagement with LCC had been undertaken and that the Roads department was aware of the proposed Turbine Delivery Route. The Board enquired as to how large turbine components would be delivered to the site regarding the avenue of mature deciduous trees which line the regional road on entry to Timahoe.

The Board's representatives advised that the Climate Chapter (Chapter 6) of the EIA should adequately outline the carbon resources required to construct the Proposed Development and outline what savings are made by the displacement of fossil fuel generated electricity.

The Board's representatives also recommended that the current pre-application case be kept open for the present time and said that a further meeting could be accommodated in respect of updates on the Proposed Development and feedback from stakeholders and relevant prescribed bodies.

The Board requested further information regarding the criteria under section 37A(2)(a) (strategic economic or social importance of the project) might be of assistance to the reporting inspector in assessing the SID status of the Proposed Development. Following the completion of the meeting, the applicant issued a clarification setting out the strategic economic and social importance of the project- this was included as an addendum to the official meeting minutes and is set out in Technical Appendix 2.3 found in Volume III of this EIA.

2.3.4 Second Pre-application Consultation Meeting with An Bord Pleanála

A second pre-application meeting with An Bord Pleanála was held on the 16th of November, 2022. The topics discussed included consultation scoping responses received, the resulting evolution of the Proposed Development, and further legislative updates including the need for design flexibility.

Scoping responses were discussed in some detail, as two of these scoping responses (inland Fisheries Ireland and Geological Survey of Ireland) resulted in changes to the Proposed Development layout. Further detail on these changes is found in section 2.3.5 of this chapter.



Policy context was also covered at length, given significant policy changes such as REPowerEU brought about in response to the geopolitical tensions in Ukraine as well as domestic legislation related to design flexibility

The Board left the option open to the applicant to leave the pre-application consultation open into 2023 so that further discussions on the Proposed Development could be held.

2.3.5 SID Pre-Application Closure and List of Prescribed bodies

The SID pre-application consultation was closed on 11th May 2023. A list of prescribed bodies was provided by An Bord Pleanála. The prescribed bodies which have been provided are as follows:

- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Development Applications Unit)
- Minister for Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
- National Parks & Wildlife Service
- Minister for Transport
- Irish Water
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Environmental Protection Agency
- The Heritage Council
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- Irish Aviation Authority
- Office of Public Works
- Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly
- Kilkenny County Council
- Laois County Council

As part of the informal scoping process, all prescribed bodies listed above were contacted and provided copies of the scoping report and kept abreast of any further changes. Scoping responses, where received have been included in Technical Appendix 2.1 in Volume III of this EIA. A summation of all relevant scoping responses is set out in section 2.3.6 Once An Bord Pleanála provided this list of prescribed bodies, each was contacted further and informed of an impending planning application.

2.3.6 Scoping and Consultation Responses with Key Stakeholders

A brief summation of consultation responses with key stakeholders, including where each response is addressed within the EIA is found in **Table 2-2**.



Table 2-2 Summary of Key Consultation Responses and How They Have Been Addressed

Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
<p>Laois County Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure inclusion of regional context in addition to both national and local context in the Introduction chapter. • Consider alternative turbine numbers in Site Selection and Alternatives. • EIAR should have regard to LCC Noise Action Plan 2018. • Water (Hydrology, Flood Risk and Hydrogeology) details to be included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Storm Water Management - storm water runoff management, calculations and mitigation measures to be included. ○ Surface Water Quality - A baseline water quality analysis for each watercourse identified, surface water quality monitoring points to be identified and proposed surface water monitoring regime to be employed. • Groundwater Quality - include potential impacts on the groundwater quality of the Kyle Spring Public Water Supply in EIAR. Provide details on proposed substation, bunding etc. where relevant. Provide the identification of groundwater quality monitoring points and all mitigation measures. Identify proposed groundwater monitoring regime to be employed. • EIAR should provide detail of Protected Structures as per Appendix 1 of LCC DP 2021 – 2027. • Access, Traffic and Transport to have regard to Laois Roads and Parking Standards 2007 Document. It is limited to access arrangements. Additional listed requirements include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ measures to prevent flow of surface water from the site onto public road(s). ○ Wheel washes to prevent dirt and debris onto public road(s). ○ Details relating to haulage routes, the number of traffic movements per day together with the weights and types of vehicles. ○ The locations of quarries from which stone and concrete will be sourced, and associated traffic movements shall be incorporated into a transport Impact Assessment. ○ A road opening licence for the route of the ESB grid connection will be required. ○ A precondition survey identifying bridges and culverts on haulage routes and the ESB grid connection route. This shall include tests such as visual video inspections and FWD tests and Pavement Condition Survey (PCS). Post road video inspection and post PCS surveys will need to be carried out for a number of years post construction. 	<p>Regional Context has been addressed in Chapter 4 and in the planning statement</p> <p>Site selection / alternatives has been addressed in Chapter 17</p> <p>Water concerns including surface and ground water has been addressed in Chapter 9</p> <p>Relevant protected structures are addressed in Chapter 11</p> <p>Traffic and transport concerns are addressed in Chapter 12</p> <p>Material sourcing is addressed in Chapter 12</p> <p>Grid Connection concerns- have been noted and will be addressed with the cable corridor planning application</p> <p>Landscape concerns are noted in Chapter 7</p> <p>Waste Management addressed in Chapter 5</p> <p>Planning policy concerns have been addressed in Chapter 4 and in the planning statement accompanying this planning application</p> <p>Public Consultation addressed in Section 2.4 of this chapter.</p>



Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Bridge inspection surveys (preconstruction and post construction). Heavy load permits for the delivery of the wind turbines will be required. Any alterations that may be required to bridges, signs, road junctions will need to be identified. • Landscape and visual assessment should consider Map 11.8 of CDP in EIAR. • Population, Human Health and Material Assets chapters to consider waste management for construction and operational phases. The construction phases shall also include for the transport and disposal of surplus material off-site, if relevant. • EIAR should refer to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and ABP on carrying out EIA (August 2018) and include Planning Policy, Telecommunications and Aviation and Interactions. • Planning Policy – Must have regard to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No.296 of 2018); o DOEHLG AA of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009) o Court Ruling (case C-323/17 People Over Wind and Peter Sweetman v Coillte); o Project Ireland 2040; NDP 2018 - 2027; o CAP 2019/2021; o National Mitigation Plan 2017; o Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. o Review LCDP and its appendices in full. • Per Wind Energy Map, Site is an " Area Not Open for Consideration" to wind farm development. Refers to Ministerial Direction and requested changes. • Any forthcoming EIAR should outline clear proposals in relation to public consultation initiatives (proposed or undertaken). 	
<p>Kilkenny County Council</p>	<p><i>Wind Energy Development Strategy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 15th October 2021, the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, consequent to a recommendation made to him by the Office of the Planning Regulator under section 31AM(8) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), notified Kilkenny County Council of his intention to issue a Direction to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027. 	<p>Wind Energy Development Strategy: This is addressed in the Planning Statement accompanying this planning application</p> <p>Nature Conservation: This is addressed in Chapter 15 of this EIAR and in the accompanying NIS.</p>



Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In accordance with Section 31(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, those parts of the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 Plan referred to in the notice shall be taken not to have come into effect, been made or amended; namely; Chapter 11, Renewable Energy Section 11.4 Kilkenny Targets, Section 11.5.1 Current status and targets and Figure 11.4 Wind Strategy areas. <p>Nature Conservation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The River Barrow and River Nore SAC, which is designated Natura 2000 site, is located close to the Proposed Development wind farm and the associated NIS should ensure that there shall be no significant impact on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 site. The EIAR shall also address potential impacts pertaining to County Kilkenny in addition to County Laois. <p>Visual impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The visual impacts of the Proposed Development and cumulative visual impacts with existing and permitted wind farms shall also be taken into account in the overall assessment of the Proposed Development. 	<p>Visual Impact – addressed in Chapter 7 and in the accompanying photomontages.</p>
Carlow County Council	No response received	N/A
Irish Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No capacity to respond to individual projects but in general, has provided the following comments: Ensure no negative impact/ measures on drinking water. Mitigation for any negative impact on water sources. Assess all potential impacts on nearby reservoir or public water supply. E) Consider whether impacts of the development on the capacity of water services. If a development will require a connection to either a public water supply or sewage collection system, the developer is advised to submit a Pre Connection Enquiry (PCE) enquiry to IW to determine the feasibility of connection to the Irish Water network. Any upgrade in water services infrastructure required. In relation to a development that would discharge trade effluent – any upstream treatment or attenuation of discharges required prior to discharging to an IW collection network. Management of surface water impacts. Any physical impacts to Irish Water assets. 	<p>The concerns outlined in this chapter where relevant have been addressed in Chapter 9 Water</p>



Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential impacts to receiving waters. Potential impact on the contributing catchment of water sources. Conservation objectives of site Mitigation measures. This is not an exhaustive list. Where connection(s) to the public network is required as part of your development proposal, applicants are advised to complete the Pre Connection Enquiry process and have received a Confirmation of feasibility letter from Irish Water ahead of any planning application. <p>Irish Water will not accept new surface water discharges to combined sewer networks.</p>	
Department of Defence	<p>Based on the information supplied and having consulted with the subject matter experts in the Irish Air Corps, the Department of Defence wishes to make the following observation:</p> <p>Single turbines, structures, or turbines delineating the wind farm should be illuminated by Type C, Medium intensity, Fixed Red obstacle lighting with a minimum output of 2,000 candela to be visible in all directions of azimuth and to be operational H24/7 days a week. Obstacle lighting should be incandescent or of a type visible to Night Vision equipment. Obstacle lighting must emit light at the near Infra-Red (IR) range of the electromagnetic spectrum, specifically at or near 850 nanometres (nm) of wavelength. Light intensity to be of similar value to that emitted in the visible spectrum of light.</p>	<p>Lighting has been noted and the developer is happy to accept a planning condition requiring this information</p>
Inland Fisheries Ireland	<p>The IFI notes that the Proposed Development is in the Nore and Barrow catchments and notes that it is in the catchment areas of the following surface water bodies Clogh 010 (WFD Status - Good; Risk Status - At Risk), Owveg (Nore) 010 (WFD Status - Good, Risk Status - Not at Risk), Crooked (Stradbally) 010 (WFD Status - Good; Risk Status - Not at Risk), Stradbally (Laois) 020 (WFD Status - Good, Risk Status Not at Risk), Douglass (Laois) 010 (WFD Status - High, Risk Status - not at Risk).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 28(2) of the Surface Water Regulations (SI 272 of 2009) states that a surface water body whose status is determined to be less than good shall be restored to at least good status. Furthermore, Article 5 states that there should be no deterioration in Ecological Status. The proposed surveys / reports must demonstrate how this project would cause no deterioration to the above surface water bodies within the third cycle of the national River Basin Management Plan. A comprehensive map of all aquatic habitats potentially affected by the project should be provided in the reports. Include An assessment of all potential adverse effects on all relevant aquatic receptors, including fish. The cumulative effects of the Proposed Development along with other existing or approved projects should also be considered. This should include an 	<p>Noted. All concerns related to the Nore and Barrow catchments are set out in Chapter 15 and in the accompanying NIS.</p> <p>All Water Framework Directive, Surface Water, Ground Water concerns are set out in Chapter 9</p> <p>All aquatic habitats and baseline ecological assessment of watercourses are set out in Chapter 15</p> <p>Physio-chemical and biological surveys discussed in Chapters 9 and 15 of this EIAR.</p> <p>Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and adjacent to Waters 2016 discussed in Chapter 9 and 15 and addressed in Appendix 3.2 CEMP</p>



Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
	<p>assessment of the impact on the conservation objectives of species listed as qualifying interests in the Barrow – Nore SAC, which include Lamprey species and Atlantic Salmon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline ecological assessments of water courses potentially affected by the Proposed Development, including biological and physico-chemical surveys, should also be provided. Following the commencement of works, field testing and laboratory analysis of parameters should be undertaken at agreed sites. The reports should include locations, timing and frequency of the proposed monitoring of biological and physico-chemical parameters. A full list of parameters should also be provided. • Records should be kept of biological and chemical monitoring of undertaken before, during and after the works. Records should also be kept of inspections of proposed surface water mitigation measures. These records should be made available upon request to any authorised person as defined under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts. • The Applicant must adhere to Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and adjacent to Waters 2016. • Instream works may only take place during the period 1 July to 30 September. There should be no interference with the bed, gradient, profile or alignment of watercourses without prior notification and the agreement of Inland Fisheries Ireland. Proposed instream works must be accompanied by a site-specific method statement provided to IFI. • The number of new water crossings should be minimised. Where existing crossings must undergo alteration, IFI request that these crossings are upgraded in the interests of habitat improvement and biodiversity net gain. IFI should be consulted at the design phase to maximise favourable outcomes. Where works on water crossings are proposed, method statements must be provided. • The number of new water crossings should be minimised. Where existing crossings must undergo alteration, IFI request that these crossings are upgraded in the interests of habitat improvement and biodiversity net gain. IFI should be consulted at the design phase to maximise favourable outcomes. Where works on water crossings are proposed, method statements must be provided. • SuDS principles should be incorporated into surface water management plans to attenuate any run-off of suspended solids or other deleterious matter. Drainage infrastructure should be installed during dry ground conditions. • Any EIAR, NIS and/or application for planning should include a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), a Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP), and an Emergency Response Plan (EMP) in case of an emergency incident. Provision should be made for the 	<p>In Stream works are noted and discussed in Chapters 9 and 15 and in the NIS and CEMP.</p> <p>New watercourse crossings have been minimised during the design of the layout of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>SuDs have been incorporated into the drainage design of the Proposed Development</p> <p>A CEMP, Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP), and an Emergency Response Plan (EMP) have been included with this planning application</p>



Key Consultee	Consultee Response	How the response has been addressed
	<p>appointment of a suitably qualified Project Environmental Manager and Ecological Clerk of Works.</p>	
<p>Geological Survey Ireland</p>	<p>A scoping response was received from the Geological Survey of Ireland on 30th June 2022. Key concerns and requests were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No envisaged impacts on the integrity of current proximate CGSs (Luggacurren Stream Section, Luggacurren Fireclay Pit, Moyadd Stream, Clogh River, Flemings Fireclay Quarries) to the Proposed Development. However, particular concern in relation to any ancillary works around the edges of the wind farm site including potential impact of access roads during construction phase. Requests that CGSs be taken into consideration in any design of such works. • The Groundwater Data Viewer indicates several aquifers classed as a 'Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Moderately Productive', a 'Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive except for Local Zones' and a 'Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive', underlie the Proposed Development. It was recommended use of the Groundwater Viewer to identify areas of High to Extreme Vulnerability and 'Rock at or near surface' in assessments, as any groundwater-surface water interactions that might occur would be greatest in these areas. • Noted two Public Water Scheme (PWS) /groundwater drinking water abstractions (Kyle & Orchard Springs and Swan Water Supply Scheme). Design of drainage will need to be cognisant of the public water scheme and the interactions between surface water and groundwater as well as run-off. Appropriate design should be undertaken by qualified and competent persons to include mitigation measures as necessary, such as SUDs or other drainage mitigation measures. • Any excavation/cuttings required should ensure that groundwater flow within the zones of contribution to the groundwater abstraction points is not disrupted, resulting in diminished yields. Note that there could be other groundwater abstractions in the locality for which Geological Survey Ireland has not undertaken studies, and a robust assessment should be undertaken by qualified and competent persons including a survey of all current wells and water abstractions within the vicinity. Given the nearby drinking water source (Public Water Supply Scheme), the effects of any potential contamination / dewatering as a result of the wind farm project would need to be assessed. 	



2.4 Community Consultation

In accordance with the Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland, the developers of the Proposed Development appointed a Community Liaison Office (CLO) to engage with the public throughout the development of the Project as a whole. The CLO was responsible for communication between the public and the developer's team. The CLO's role included door to door consultation with community members within 1.6km of the Proposed Development, distribution of project materials to community members, follow up meetings with community members where required, liaison between local residents and the project team and communication of any project updates.

Project information was distributed by leaflet drops to houses within a 1.6km radius of the Proposed Development. Follow-up visits to households of members of the public were also undertaken where requested to discuss the details of the project. Further details, including dates are included in the sections following.

2.4.1 Project Website

A dedicated Project website was set up which presented updates on the Proposed Development and the Project as a whole. The website hosted a platform for the review of Proposed Development information as well as an interactive GIS based community consultation tool and virtual consultation room, allowing for members of the public to voice their comments and concerns for the Proposed Development. The Project website also included contact details of the CLO. The website address is as follows:

<https://coolglasswindfarm.ie/>

2.4.2 Door to Door Community Engagement

The Community Liaison Officer (CLO) commenced door-to-door community consultation in the area of the Proposed Development on 10th January – 7th February 2023. All dwellings within 1.6 km of the proposed turbines were visited to inform them of the Proposed Development and relay feedback to the development team in order to inform the design process of the Proposed Development. Project information leaflets were provided to all households, including follow up calls to community members who may have missed the initial visit. Postcards were provided via letterbox householders who were not home at the time of the visit or were behind gates.

Further door to door consultation took place in May and June of 2023 where the community members were presented with a project information leaflet, a map of the planning layout of the Proposed Development and contact information for the CLO. The project information leaflet set out contact details for respondents to organise a call-back meeting if they wanted to discuss any aspect of the Proposed Development and the Project as a whole. In addition, the leaflet contained QR codes directly linking to the community consultation portal documented in section 2.4.4, and to the virtual consultation room outlined in section 2.4.3. A number of call-back meeting requests were received, and meetings were arranged for each request.

2.4.3 Virtual Consultation Room

A virtual consultation room (VCR) was set up for members of the public to obtain key information about the Proposed Development while sharing their views. The VCR was launched in May of 2023 following one round of door-to-door community engagement. The VCR demonstrated the evolution of the Proposed Development following community feedback from the initial round of consultation in tandem with environmental assessment which guided the design process.



The VCR was broken down in the following headings:

- A welcome video setting out an introduction to Statkraft, the parent company of the Applicant and a brief overview of the Project.
- **About Statkraft**- where Statkraft, the parent company of the Applicant, introduced who the company is to the general public
- **Project overview and evolution**– where the Proposed Development was set out in simple terms for the public and the evolution of the Project was briefly synopsised. A voluntary question for consultees to answer what aspects of the Project was most important to them was also provided.
- **The need for the Project** – this section set out the importance of the impact of climate change and energy security in tandem with the goal of sustainability. Two voluntary questions were provided for consultees to answer related to the personal view of the consultee on the benefits of renewable energy
- Links to the community consultation brochures from both rounds of community door to door consultation
- **The process of environmental impact** – a diagram of the process was provided.
- **Community feedback** – a brief overview of how community consultation inputs affected the assessment and a response to the most common concerns voiced by the community
- **Community Benefit Fund** – a brief section of what the community benefit fund is and what the community is entitled to as a result of the Proposed Development. Three voluntary questions were provided for consultees to disclose how they would like the fund to be disbursed within their community and what they considered to be the most important use of the fund.
- **A map of the Proposed Development layout** – with a voluntary section allowing the consultee to enter details of their location
- A link to a selected number of photomontages to demonstrate the visual impact that the proposed turbines would have on the surrounding areas
- **Contact us** – an area which provided the contact details of the community liaison officer and an area for a consultee to leave their own contact details

2.4.4 Project Consultation Feedback Form

A specialised online Geographic Information Systems (GIS) form was created to capture feedback and views from the community. This form was provided in two ways- firstly as a QR code on the project brochures used in round 2 of the door-to-door community engagement works, and secondly via a dedicated link in the project website. This form provided key information to households, such as an exact distance to the nearest turbine from their home as well as providing a platform for households to provide their feedback and concerns on the Proposed Development and on specific environmental, landscape and other concerns, including how community development funds might be utilised.

This feedback form was structured as follows:

- Page 1 took voluntarily given details of the consultee such as Eircode or a point on the map and generated the distance in km to the nearest turbine of the Proposed Development



- Page 2 allowed for the consultee to select whether it was a home address or other location. Dropdown areas allowed the consultee to specify what the other location was
- Page 3 allowed the consultee to select a number of key concerns such as 'environmental', 'landscape' or general comment. Each of these primary headings allowed the consultee to specify concerns related to these headings and allowed an open text box for the consultee to state more details about their concerns. This page also allowed for some feedback on how the consultee would like to see the community benefit fund disbursed within the local community.
- Page 4 provided a summary of all entries into the tool to this point, and allowed for a blank text box to provide any additional information
- Page 5 allowed for a submission button.

2.5 Summary of All Key Issues

2.5.1 Key Issues Raised during Scoping

The scoping process proved beneficial to the identification of potential issues in relation to the Proposed Development. Responses from the consultees identified a range of observations which have been taken into consideration in the preparation of the respective chapters of this EIAR. Issues raised during the scoping process are as follows:

2.5.1.1 Inland

Inland Fisheries Ireland

Key issues noted in the Inland Fisheries Ireland response are summarised below.

- the location of the Proposed Development was adjacent to the river Nore and Barrow catchment areas and requested the following:
- Proposed surveys and reports have regard to Article 5 and Article 28(2) of the Surface Water Regulations (SI 272 of 2009) where applicable, and to demonstrate that the project would cause no deterioration to surface water bodies.
- A comprehensive map of all aquatic habitats potentially affected by the project to be included in all reports, with an assessment of all potential adverse effects on relevant aquatic receptors.
- Baseline ecological assessments should include biological and physio-chemical survey results were requested to be provided.
- Watercourse crossings should be minimised where possible, and where existing crossings must be altered, engagement with the IFI is required during the design phase.
- SUDS principals to be incorporated into Surface Water Management Plans.

2.5.1.2 Geological Survey of Ireland

Key concerns and requests from the Geological Survey of Ireland were as follows:

- Area under wind farm development noted as a 'Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Moderately Productive', a 'Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive except for Local Zones' and a 'Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive', underlie the Proposed Development. It was recommended use of the Groundwater Viewer to identify areas of High to Extreme



Vulnerability and 'Rock at or near surface' in assessments, as any groundwater-surface water interactions that might occur would be greatest in these areas.

- Noted two Public Water Scheme (PWS) /groundwater drinking water abstractions (Kyle & Orchard Springs and Swan Water Supply Scheme). Design of drainage will need to be cognisant of the public water scheme and the interactions between surface water and groundwater as well as run-off. Appropriate design should be undertaken by qualified and competent persons to include mitigation measures as necessary, such as SUDs or other drainage mitigation measures.
- Any excavation/cuttings required should ensure that groundwater flow within the zones of contribution to the groundwater abstraction points is not disrupted, resulting in diminished yields. Note that there could be other groundwater abstractions in the locality for which Geological Survey Ireland has not undertaken studies, and a robust assessment should be undertaken by qualified and competent persons including a survey of all current wells and water abstractions within the vicinity. Given the nearby drinking water source (Public Water Supply Scheme), the effects of any potential contamination / dewatering as a result of the wind farm project would need to be assessed.

2.5.2 Key issues Raised during the Pre-application process

The pre-application process was comprised of one no pre-application consultation with Laois County Council and one no. meeting with Laois Co. Roads department. Additionally, there were two no. pre-application meetings with An Bord Pleanála which were summarised in sections 2.3.1 – 2.3.3 of this chapter.

2.5.2.1 Laois County Council

Key issues with Laois County Council involved:

- Transportation / Roads:
- Damage to the road network during the construction and decommissioning phases of the project
- Pre and post construction condition surveys required to ascertain the road conditions along the haul routes, in particular stone culverts under roads, PSCI survey.
- Drainage concerns
- Ensuring sightlines are met as per the Laois 2007 Road Guidelines
- Any works proposed to bridges and culverts
- Ecology and environmental concerns included
- nature based stormwater solutions to the design of the project
- Kyle Spring and Swan public water supplies to be included in the EIA
- Planning concerns included
- The site is located in an area that is not open to consideration for wind farm development
- Visual impact on Timahoe



- Visual impact on Windy Gap on the N80 and the Rock of Dunamase, both protected views. These views were specifically requested to form part of the assessment process
 - o What the community benefit package would be
- Ongoing consultation on the revised Wind Energy Strategy to be forthcoming following ministerial direction

2.5.2.2 An Bord Pleanála

Key issues raised by An Bord Pleanála include:

- Clarity on how LCC is addressing revisions to the Renewable Energy Strategy for the County.
- any planning application and studies should be cognisant of effects on tourism and amenities of the area.
- effects on hydrological regimes in the area should be assessed robustly and that engagement with the NPWS on this issue would be recommended.
- Recommendation of further engagement with the traffic department of the local authority.
- Climate Chapter of the EIAR should adequately outline the carbon resources required to construct the Proposed Development and outline what the savings are by displacement of fossil fuel generated electricity

2.5.3 Key Issues Raised during Public Consultation

A number of key considerations were raised during the public consultation process and are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

2.5.3.1 Proximity and Height

Concerns have been highlighted by local residents about the perceived proximity of turbines to their homes. This is likely due to the combined nature of the turbine sizes and upland nature of the Site in comparison to the perceived level ground to the north of the Proposed Development looking south, and from areas to the east and west of the Proposed Development looking onto the Site.

Another consideration in relation to perceptions of proximity is the two-cluster arrangement of the Proposed Development, particularly to homes between the two clusters and from the south looking north across the site. However, all turbines are in excess of 720m from all residential receptors and sensitive siting has been employed during the design process to minimise the perception of overbearing and proximity.

Height was an important consideration in the design process of the Proposed Development as set out in Chapter 16. The initial design considered 23 turbines of a bigger height of 187.5m over a three-cluster design. Further design options reduced the quantum of turbines and resulted in a reduction in height. Of key importance to the evolution of the design was the consideration of visual impact.

It was considered that the slightly increased sense of visual dominance imparted is preferable to the reduced level of permeability and increased visual clutter associated with a greater number of shorter turbines required to achieve the same output. A 170m tip height involved a greater number of turbines and would have resulted in visual clutter. For these reasons the 170 m tip height was eliminated from the potential options.



This left two tip height options, a 190m tip height and a 180 m tip height. A 190m tip height would have involved fewer turbines and may have been commercially viable, however, a 190m tip height, if applied across the southern cluster would have resulted in an overbearing effect on receptors in the vicinity of The Swan. It was therefore determined that a 180m tip height was appropriate for the scheme. Further detail on this is found in section 17.3.3 of Chapter 17 of this EIAR.

2.5.3.2 Heritage, St Mo Chua and Historical Mining

Engagement with the local communities has been ongoing for several years prior to the assessment of the Proposed Development in order to ascertain the unique history and heritage of the area surrounding the Site. It was evident from early discussions with people living near the Proposed Development that heritage and tourism were important considerations for the communities of Wolfhill, Timahoe and Swan. Both archaeological and industrial heritage are present in these communities and have influenced the design process. Heritage is also anticipated to influence community amenities which could be provided as part of the Proposed Development and associated community benefit fund.

Wolfhill Coal Mine

The Wolfhill Coal Mine was a significant employer to the area of Wolfhill and Swan between the years of 1939 and 1961. In 2018, the Wolfhill Coalmine Project opened an exhibit in Portlaoise capturing the photographs of miners and their families, newspaper archives, social and community history, original documents relating to the mine and recorded interviews with former miners, as well as their families and descendants.

While the initial design of the wind farm comprised three clusters- the southernmost cluster, the location of the historical coal mine was removed from the design early in the assessment process for two reasons:

- The mining heritage of the area once initial consultation research and consultation was undertaken, and
- The location of historical mining shafts in the area.

Further information of the historical mine locations in the area is found in Technical Appendix 8.1 found in Volume III of this EIAR.

Brick Factory – The Swan

Located on the main street of Swan, it is worth noting Fleming’s Fireclays, colloquially known in the community as the brick factory. This factory was a significant source of industrial employment to the area and was responsible for the majority of the housing located in the Swan up to the early 2000’s. The factory opened in the mid 1930s and was absorbed into the Lagan group and later the Breedon group in 2018. The factory briefly produced chimney products, flue liners and chimney pots but is no longer in continual operation.

As one of the few examples of industrial heritage in the area, consideration has been given to the local community as to the distribution of the community benefit fund. Engagement is still ongoing within this community at the time of writing this chapter. Further information is contained in Chapter 11 of this EIAR.

Timahoe and Timahoe Round Tower

The town of Timahoe is rich in cultural and archaeological heritage. In the centre of the village of Timahoe sits an intact round tower dating from the destruction of an earlier monastery in 1142. Adjacent to this tower are the remnants of a much older church dating



from the same period while 20m from both the tower and the older church is a gothic revival church from the mid 19th century. The village has been subject to plunder in the 12th century given the significant ecclesiastical uses in the area at the time. At the western side of the village is a 7th century Christian monastery which was founded by Saint Mo Chua, whom the village gets its name. Unfortunately, there is no longer any archaeological remains from this monastery visible and not much more is known.

Between the town itself and other significant cultural heritage assets in the local area such as the Rock of Dunamase, Timahoe does have a tourism draw to the area. The local community takes pride in the town and the assets which give the town a striking central square (the tower and the two churches) are a dominant focal point for the area. Further information is contained in Chapter 11 of this EIAR.

Energy Security

The topic of energy security has become more well known to the general public due to the current geopolitical tensions between Ukraine and Russia. During the most recent rounds of community consultation in the area, it was evident that the local community, particularly in areas around Wolfhill and housing around the northern end of the site are aware of the importance of providing domestic energy security and for the Country to wean off the imports of fossil fuel. These areas in particular have been supportive of the Proposed Development given the energy security context.

Cable Route / Substation connection

As part of the assessment of the Proposed Development, two cable corridors have been included and are shown in Figure 3-2 of Chapter 3 of this EIAR. The EIAR assessed both options and it is the objective of the Applicant to take the preferred cable route through a future separate planning process once more is known about these routes and whether further optimisations are required. The cable route options are:

- Option 1 - a cable route which extends from the on-site substation, utilising local roads to its termination point at Pinewoods substation.
- Option 2 - a cable route which extends from the on-site substation, utilising local roads, crossing through Timahoe before eventually leaving the public road and connecting at the Coolnabacky substation.

Local community members have voiced concerns about Option 2 given the perceived proximity of the groundwater levels to the surface in the area around the Coolnabacky substation.

It is worth noting that while both routes are assessed as part of this EIAR, there are technical feasibility considerations which in tandem with environmental assessment, will determine the exact cable route to be brought forward into a future planning application. Other considerations to the final cable route include feedback which has been obtained from LCC (see section 2.3.2). The final cable route will be chosen following the completion of all environmental and technical considerations and above all, based on the capacity available on the National Grid.



Other Issues

Other issues which have been raised during the public consultation process include:

- Consultation Groups – the community benefit fund and how utilise this to fund amenity trails and sports facilities, heritage and community facilities.
- Queries around Whooper Swans / marsh Fritillary/ Butterfly / hen harrier and whether their presences are found on site. These species are discussed within Chapter 15 of this EIAR.
- The potential impacts from Electromagnetic Frequency (EMF) on Health. This topic is discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 10 of this EIAR.
- Public Service Obligation (PSO) levies

2.6 Results from Community Consultation

2.6.1 Background

Initial public consultation for a wind energy proposal at this location began at a very early stage in the development process, with engagement with the local community beginning during initial feasibility and scoping stages back as far as 2013 when the proposed wind farm encompassed part of the much larger proposed Greenwire wind development. At that time, a nominated Community Liaison Officer (CLO) was appointed to the area. This larger proposed development was ultimately put on hold but Coolglass as a standalone development has now been progressed through design and to pre-planning stage.

Public consultation specific to the proposed Coolglass Wind Farm commenced in January 2023 at an early stage in its' development process. At that time, a Community Liaison Strategy (CLS) was established and set into motion with a newly nominated CLO being appointed for this specific project. Since this time, this CLO has been the main point of contact with the local community. Engagement with the CLO was conducted over the following months and included meeting with those in the local community to deal with queries and feedback. A second round of consultations consisting of in-person calls to all houses in the area took place in May and June of 2023. Engagement will continue throughout the life of this proposal, continuing during development and extending into construction and operations where the project comes to fruition.

The CLS is based on the 'Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland Guidelines for Community Engagement'. The Code's core fundamentals are to engage with the local community in an open, honest, and transparent manner with the aim of providing clear and understandable information on a project, and for getting feedback from, and the views of, the local community and to use this information to inform the design and development process. This gives the local community a chance to have input in the project development path and influence the final project design. The CLS was based on the fundamental principle of active engagement with all households within a minimum of 1.6km of the design layout under consideration, with the view to opening a two-way dialogue with people in this area. To date, all houses in this area have been visited, with project information and contact details provided. In all, 343 face-to-face meetings have been held with residents in the local area. Some of these meetings were held on an individual level, while others involved meeting small groups of people together. The form that the meetings took in terms of numbers was dictated by the residents; we worked to facilitate their schedules and preferred format in all cases with the CLO engaging with all who made contact regarding the proposal. Wider access to information was made and is available via the project website and virtual consultation room facilities.



There are 54 houses within 1km of the proposed development. Of these, 70% met and engaged with us. Residents in all houses within 1.6km of the proposed layout, totalling 171 houses (including the 54 within 1km), were provided with information at least twice, with engagement extending to residents in a number of properties beyond 1.6km. Where it was not possible to engage directly with residents as they were not home, 'Sorry we missed you' cards with contact details and QR codes to the community consultation portal and Coolglass website were left at the property. Over 60 meetings resulted from leaving these cards at properties.

The core objective of this consultation approach was to provide information on what was being considered and to receive feedback from people in the local community which would be used to inform the design process.

An important aspect of the community engagement strategy was the distribution of project information and the gathering of feedback. In total, 450 project booklets were distributed across the local and wider area.

The following information was provided to all homes within the consultation area:

- Contact details for contacting the CLO at any time
- 2 no. Project booklets
- Details on the project website
- Details of the virtual consultation room

Update newsletter prior to planning submission

An up-to-date newsletter is being coordinated to be distributed advising of the planning submission with the timing to coincide with the lodgement of the planning application.

2.6.1.1 Project Booklets, Website, Virtual Consultation Room, and Feedback Form

The CLO called to every house in the area with a detailed project booklet in January 2023. The main purpose of these visits was for the CLO to introduce himself, provide contact details and to provide information on the project under consideration, with the view to establishing a line of dialogue between the company and residents.

2.6.1.2 Project Booklet Number 1

At the initial meetings, information and a booklet on the project being considered were provided. The project booklet was in the form of an 8-page booklet which detailed information on what was being considered, outlined the opportunity to provide feedback, advised how this feedback would be used in the design process and provided details on where people could get further information. Project contact and website details were clearly outlined on this booklet.

This booklet also contained educational information about climate change and fossil fuel dependency to provide context on why this project was being considered. Furthermore, the booklet outlined how the project could bring benefits to the local area and sought feedback from people on how they thought that the Community Benefit Fund should be used. A flexible approach has been taken to facilitate the timing of meetings e.g., arrangements to meet with people at times and locations convenient to them. Engagement ultimately extended beyond the CLS-identified area and reached 1.6 kilometres and more from the proposed turbine locations. A total of 179 households were individually contacted with information regarding the proposed project, with feedback on the proposal sought.



2.6.1.3 Project Website

A project-specific website (www.coolglasswindfarm.ie) was created for this proposal. The website includes a virtual consultation room (VCR) featuring photomontages, videos, explanations on Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) and the SID application, as well as a community survey. This website went live in January 2023 shortly after the commencement of community engagement. The purpose of the website is to provide the public and all stakeholders with an up-to-date platform on project information. The project website is used to provide context for the project, an educational section to develop a greater understanding of the issues being faced, information on how these issues can be addressed and details on the need for renewable energy development. The website also provides information on the project and on the consultation approach. The project website has evolved with the project and continues to be a source of updated information as the project progresses. The aim has been to keep the information clear, concise, and engaging on this website.

A feedback facility as outlined below was also incorporated into the site.

The website was well utilised with 1,700 visits to the project website from over 300 users over the course of engagement on this proposal.

2.6.1.4 Project Booklet Number 2

A second booklet was distributed by the CLO to all houses within the consultation area. This was carried out during May and June of 2023 in advance of the submission of the planning application. This was to ensure that everyone in the local area was aware that firstly, the design review stage of the project was reaching its conclusion and that a planning layout had been established and secondly, that people were notified and aware that a planning submission was due to be submitted in the near future. This circulation process was carried out in person by the project CLO and efforts were made to meet with all homeowners in the area to discuss the project and provide updates. These booklets gave feedback from the consultation process, detailed an estimated timeline for submitting the planning application and provided an indicative timeline for the future stages of the development process. People were again encouraged to continue to provide feedback, to visit the project website for updates, or to contact the CLO for additional information.

2.6.1.5 Virtual Consultation Room

A virtual consultation room (VCR) was set up for members of the public to obtain key information about the Proposed Development while sharing their views. The VCR was launched in May of 2023 following distribution of the first project booklet and door-to-door community engagement. The VCR demonstrated the evolution of the Proposed Development following community feedback from the initial round of consultation in tandem with environmental assessment which guided the design process.

The VCR was broken down in the following headings:

- A welcome video setting out an introduction to Statkraft, the parent company of the Applicant and a brief overview of the Project.
- **About Statkraft**- where Statkraft, the parent company of the Applicant, introduced who the company is to the general public
- **Project overview and evolution** – where the Proposed Development was set out in simple terms for the public and the evolution of the Project was briefly synopsized.



A voluntary question for consultees to answer what aspects of the Project was most important to them was also provided.

- **The need for the Project** – this section set out the importance of the impact of climate change and energy security in tandem with the goal of sustainability. Two voluntary questions were provided for consultees to answer related to the personal view of the consultee on the benefits of renewable energy
- Links to the community consultation brochures from both rounds of community door to door consultation
- **The process of environmental impact** – a diagram of the process was provided.
- **Community feedback** – a brief overview of how community consultation inputs affected the assessment and a response to the most common concerns voiced by the community
- **Community Benefit Fund** – a brief section of what the community benefit fund is and what the community is entitled to as a result of the Proposed Development. Three voluntary questions were provided for consultees to disclose how they would like the fund to be disbursed within their community and what they considered to be the most important use of the fund.
- **A map of the Proposed Development layout** – with a voluntary section allowing the consultee to enter details of their location
- A link to a selected number of photomontages to demonstrate the visual impact that the proposed turbines would have on the surrounding areas
- **Contact us** – an area which provided the contact details of the community liaison officer and an area for a consultee to leave their own contact details

This Virtual Consultation Room was advertised in the local print media – the Laois Nationalist, for 2 weeks in July 2023 with a QR code directing readers directly to the VCR where information could be found, and feedback left as outlined above.

2.6.1.6 Project Consultation Feedback Form

A specialised online Geographic Information Systems (GIS) form was created to capture feedback and views from the community. This form was provided in several ways- firstly as a QR code on 'Sorry we missed you' postcards left with residents who the CLO was unable to engage with in person during initial door-to-door consultations, secondly, within the project booklets distributed as part of the door-to-door consultations, and thirdly, via a dedicated link in the project website. This form provided key information to households, such as an exact distance to the nearest turbine from their home as well as providing a platform for households to provide their feedback and concerns on the Proposed Development and on specific environmental, landscape and other concerns, including how community development funds might be utilised.

This feedback form was structured as follows:

- **Page one** Provided information on the distance from a proposed turbine using a location provided (Eircode or a point on the map) and generated the distance from that point in km to the nearest turbine of the Proposed Development
- **Page two** allowed for the consultee to select whether it was a home address or other location
- **Page three** allowed the consultee to select a number of key concerns such as



'environmental', 'landscape' or general comment. Each of these primary headings allowed the consultee to specify concerns related to these headings and allowed an open text box for the consultee to state more details about their concerns. This page also allowed for some feedback on how the consultee would like to see the community benefit fund disbursed within the local community.

- **Page four** provided a summary of all entries into the tool to this point, and allowed for a blank text box to provide any additional information
- **Page five** allowed for a submission button.

2.6.2 Key Issues Raised During Consultation

2.6.2.1 General Feedback

During our one-to-one meetings with residents as part of the consultation process, people were actively encouraged to provide feedback on the proposal and/or their areas of concern.

Feedback from meetings with people in the area showed that the need to take effective climate action was recognised and it was apparent that many people in this area are considering what changes they will need to make in their daily lives to play their part in combatting climate change. The local community also well understood that Ireland cannot continue to rely on imported fossil fuels such as oil and gas for its energy needs, the importance of Ireland's energy security and how this project could help to achieve this aim.

While the need for the development of renewable energy was appreciated, there remained an apprehension about the development of wind energy in the area. This was essentially based on the perception that this would lead to change in the area. In terms of this change, the most significant factors included the visual change that would occur, any potential effects on the area's hydrology system and what a transition to a low-carbon society will mean for families and individuals living locally.

Taking into consideration their concerns and queries, it was generally accepted that the Community Benefit Fund associated with the project would mean that people living closest to the development could benefit from locally generated electricity and the transition to a low-carbon society. There was significant interest in the benefits of this Fund and how it could deliver to the local area, with suggestions that the funding could support an amenity trail, help preserve local heritage sites or fund the installation of chargers for electric vehicles, including electric bicycles.

2.6.2.2 Feedback on Shadow Flicker

A number of people raised an initial concern regarding shadow flicker but were reassured from the outset that there will be no shadow flicker at properties in the area.

Two houses near the proposed project raised concerns about autism. During our consultation with those who engaged with us on this topic, we reiterated our commitment to eliminating shadow flicker and provided contact details for a school for children with special needs, including autism. This school has first-hand experience of bringing these children to local wind farms as a means of therapy. In addition, the school provides care for children who live close to wind farms without experiencing any ill effects.

2.6.2.3 Feedback on proximity & setback distances

A number of people raised initial queries regarding the setback distance between turbines and houses in the local area. The design proposal presented during consultation detailing a



720m set back from the nearest house not involved with the wind farm was generally acknowledged as an acceptable setback albeit that this was not unilateral.

2.6.2.4 Feedback on Visuals

As is the case in most communities, people's thoughts on how wind turbines look ranged from those who like the look of wind turbines and see them as a beacon of hope for the future, to those who have a negative view and do not like the look of them. The people who don't like the visual aspect of turbines raised this as a concern, stating that they did not like the view of turbines on the landscape. Despite these concerns, there were a number of these people who acknowledged that screening in the area would mitigate the visual impact.

A number of people also said that while they didn't particularly like the look of wind turbines, they accepted that wind farms have an important role to play in delivering effective climate action. It was generally accepted that the reduced number of turbines, increased setback and increased tip height struck a more appropriate balance in terms of the design of an acceptable proposal. The consultation team advised that photomontages would form part of the planning application and that they would have the chance to visualise the project once the design was complete and the planning application submitted for consideration. Further details of the alternatives and design process are contained in Chapter 17 of the EIAR: Site Selection and Alternatives.

2.6.2.5 Feedback on Hydrology

It was generally accepted by residents that should climate change go unchecked; an increasing number of extreme weather events are likely to be experienced in the locality. Despite this, one person still expressed concerns that the proposed development could potentially cause an issue with increased run-off that could increase the water table at critical times. Our consultation team sought information from our design team in terms of the hydrology surveys and predictions associated with this project which showed that, given the design of the wind farm in terms of the use of existing roads and the design of the drainage system (which is designed specifically for the local topography), the impacts of the wind farm on the water table would be negligible. This information was provided to the concerned residents in order to endeavour to address these concerns.

2.6.2.6 Feedback on Design

The preliminary design was reviewed to reflect consultation responses commonly received from the local public. Areas queried included potential shadow flicker, setback distances, proximity to houses and noise. Feedback gathered during this consultation process in relation to the design of the proposal was relayed to the design team who worked to take on board the local community's views and concerns. A design review process was undertaken in which this feedback, along with technical appraisals, were considered. The process gave the design team the opportunity to make amendments to the design layout and the project being considered, based on the local feedback received.

The proposed design resulted from this consultation process. The design proposal being brought forward for consultation included a commitment to eliminate shadow flicker and with a setback distance of 4x times the tip height of the proposed turbines (720m) or more to the nearest home in the community. Any potential noise from the development has been reduced as explained in the project booklet. These early design changes were welcomed and were generally seen to address people's initial concerns.

In response to queries about the grid connection, we informed the public that two potential grid connection routes from the proposed windfarm were being assessed within



the EIAR; Option 1 to the Pinewoods substation, which is located west of the proposed development, and Option 2 to the Coolnabacky substation, located north of the proposed development.

2.6.2.7 Feedback on Property Value

In terms of other local issues raised, several people highlighted to the CLO that the value of their properties could be devalued as a result of this project. In this instance, the CLO explained that there is absolutely no research that we have seen which shows that wind farms affect property prices in Ireland. A major recent study in Scotland, a country of a similar size and a similar scale wind industry to Ireland, found no evidence of a negative impact on property prices. We recommended that those who raised this issue visit a wind farm and speak to residents living close to the project to get first hand experiences.

Feedback was also received on the community benefit aspect of the project. This is outlined in the section below in 'Consultation on Community Benefit'.

2.6.2.8 Consultation on Community Benefit

In addition to what is outlined above, over the course of engagement with the local community/individuals, local businesses and community groups, feedback was actively sought on ideas regarding the form that the community benefit scheme should take and how best to achieve maximum potential benefit for the local area from the community funding that would be associated with this project.

2.6.3 Background to community benefit provided

Details were announced in October 2021 of the Government's second Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS). Renewable energy projects developed under this scheme have a significantly increased community benefit fund associated with them. For wind energy, this contribution is currently set at €2/MWhr. This would offer a significant opportunity in terms of bringing economic, environmental, and social benefits to the local area. Feedback from the local community, which is set out below, highlighted a number of ways in which people felt this fund could be beneficial.

2.6.3.1 Coolglass Wind Farm and Community Benefit

Coolglass Wind Farm is committed to ensuring that renewable energy delivers real and tangible benefits for the local communities see community involvement in such schemes as a fundamental requirement. The Community Benefit Fund for the local area, assuming an export capacity of in the region of 90MW (based on the proposed layout and working assumptions) and where developed under RESS will be approximately €470,000 per year for the local area for the duration of the scheme. The value of this fund will be directly proportional to the number of MWhs of electricity produced by the wind farm, and on the project being successful in securing RESS support and the duration of that support. This equates to a community benefit fund in the region of €7million over a 15-year period for the local area which presents a significant opportunity for developing the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the local area.

2.6.3.2 Feedback from the local community in terms of Community Benefit

During the consultation process, feedback was sought in terms of how the Community Benefit Fund could bring real and tangible benefits to the people living in the local area. A total of 54 households provided feedback on how they felt that the Community Benefit Fund should be used.



People were not only asked to consider suggestions outlined in the project booklet; we also requested that they highlight the needs of the locality as well as local initiatives and organisation they felt could benefit from support.

The breakdown of the numbers of people supporting various aspects of community benefit were as detailed in **Table 2-3** Community Benefit Support below:

Table 2-3 Community Benefit Support

Community Benefit Initiative	No. of people supporting
Amenity trail	50
EV and bike chargers	12
Funding for local heritage projects	47
Tourism initiatives	27
Local Educational Fund	2

Queries about the community benefit fund included:

- The value of the fund - Community Benefit Fund of approximately €470,000 per annum
- Opportunities for good-quality employment
- A scheme to retrofit homes
- The potential to provide facilities such as a gym, cafes, creches, facilities for older people, including active age groups and Meals on Wheels
- Tourism infrastructure
- Amenity trail
- Electric vehicle and bike charging points

The overriding message received from residents was that the Community Benefit Fund associated with this development should bring direct benefit to those living in the local area. The need for climate action was also important to residents; as a result, they suggested that the Community Benefit fund be used to assist households to reduce their carbon footprint.

2.6.3.3 Administration of the Community Benefit Fund

During our consultation, we asked people how they felt the fund should be administered. The overwhelming feedback on this was that the community should have an input into how the fund would be administered. Community involvement in decision making around how community benefit funds should be allocated is a key feature of these funds under the RESS scheme and an approach which Coolglass Wind Farm endorses and encourages. It was also highlighted to the community that a fund administrator would be appointed to oversee the establishment of structures and to ensure that the administration of the fund was carried out in a compliant and transparent manner.

2.6.3.4 Summation of Public Consultation Process

Publicly available, full, clear, and comprehensive information has been made available about the project at all key stages and consultation has been carried out in an open, transparent, and honest manner while promoting active and engaging two-way communication.



Consultation was commenced at an early stage in the development process and feedback was actively sought on the proposed wind farm. The design process incorporated the feedback received and changes were made to take account of local views where appropriate.

At all stages of the community engagement process, contact details in the form of a contact phone number and email address for enquiries were distributed. These contact details were included on the project booklets, project website along with the associated virtual consultation room. These details are again being incorporated into the newsletter to be distributing to coincide with the planning submission. Additionally, feedback facilities are provided the project website and virtual consultation room.

Leading on from this consultation approach, the CLO has become well-known in the area and has worked to foster good relations in the local community. There was good engagement from the residents and constructive feedback was received both on the design and community benefit aspects of the project. The majority of people engaged in this process, advising how they felt that the proposal could be improved, raising any concerns that they held and providing feedback on how the Community Benefit Fund could be used to bring real benefits to the local area.

2.7 Conclusion

Consultation was carried out with several stakeholders, including Laois County Council, An Bord Pleanála. Government departments, Non-Governmental Organisations, telecommunications providers, aviation organisations, local councillors, community groups and local residents. Their comments and feedback were incorporated into the design iterations and subsequently into the EIA.

Pre-planning consultation was held with both Laois County Council and An Bord Pleanála to determine the key points and potential impacts of the Proposed Development and to inform the assessment methodology.

Public consultation was facilitated by having a dedicated Community Liaison Officer on the ground by way of door to door house calls and leaflet and letter drop to ensure locals were made aware of the details of the Proposed Development and processes involved. Dedicated contact details were provided with circulated materials so members of the public could directly contact the project team. This process was commenced as early as possible in order to inform the design of the Proposed Development and to inform the EIA process. A dedicated website was also set up to allow for further open communication between the applicant and community throughout the iterative design process and run-up to the application submission.

Two facilities have been provided for the local community to allow both privacy and a forum to voice their views on the Proposed Development through the provision of the VCR and the use of the Proposed Development consultation feedback form.

Observations and issues that arose during the scoping and consultation process have informed the design, assessment and mitigation measures proposed as part of this Proposed Development. Of significance here is movement of turbines and associated infrastructure during the design evolution and the commitment to zero shadow flicker at dwellings in proximity to the Proposed Development in compliance with the 2019 draft Wind Energy Guidelines.





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