

Senior Executive Officer,  
Material Alterations - Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028,  
Planning Department,  
Carlow County Council,  
Athy Road,  
Carlow

By email to: [carlowcdp@carlowcoco.ie](mailto:carlowcdp@carlowcoco.ie)

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Proposed Amendments to Carlow Draft County Development Plan 2022-2028, Material Amendments No. 51 & 52**

Thank you for providing an opportunity to consult on the above matter. This submission is made on behalf of FuturEnergy Ireland.

FuturEnergy Ireland (FEI) is a new joint venture company owned on a 50:50 basis by Coillte and ESB. This collaboration combines the State's strongest assets and expertise in onshore renewable energy development on behalf of the people of Ireland. We are one of the largest dedicated developers of onshore wind in Ireland and our mission is to maximise the potential of our national resources and accelerate Ireland's transformation to a low carbon energy economy.

Our previous submission on the Draft Plan was made under Coillte Renewable Energy (your ref. CLW-C10-26, copied in Appendix 2). As stated in our previous submission, we have significant concerns with the Draft Plan and its limited support for onshore wind development and the associated impacts of the Plan on achieving national renewable targets.

In this regard, the development of viable onshore wind sites in the County is largely curtailed by policy WE.P4. This states that wind farm development will not normally be permissible in 'Uplands' in the county<sup>1</sup>. However, all available sites, which emerged from the Council's own wind opportunity mapping exercise, are in Upland areas<sup>2</sup>. WE.P4 also eliminates all 'preferred' and 'Open to Consideration' sites that are identified in the current Plan.

In this regard, in the Draft Plan's own analysis, WE.P4 eliminates all (18.3MW) wind potential in 'available areas' of the County in the south and southeast. A simple overlay of the 'available area' in the southeast and the Open to Consideration areas in the current Plan, shows that the Open to Consideration lands in this area have been eliminated (see illustrations in Appendix 1). We believe this a clear retrograde step in facilitating onshore wind in the County under the Draft Plan.

We further note from the analysis in the Draft Plan that apart from the existing fleet and the permitted yet unconstructed fleet, potential development in the lowlands and potential for repowering are the key elements of the strategy to facilitate new onshore wind development. However, it appears to us that this potential resource was already a feature of the current Plan. The elimination of the Open to

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<sup>1</sup> This provision does not apply to micro energy generation and community energy projects.

<sup>2</sup> Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4 of the Draft Plan. Also see Appendix 2 of Coillte submission which shows these figures side by side.

Consideration lands under policy WE.P4 however, is an overall backward step under the new Plan for onshore wind.

Our suggestion (in our previous submission) was to temper WE.P4 policy to allow a consideration of landscape and visual matters at a site specific level in these areas. This was rejected outright in the CE report, which said that the landscape, topography and solar energy resource of the County makes solar development a sensible strategy<sup>3</sup>. National policy in the Climate Action Plan 2021 however dictates that a balance of technology solutions is required to meet national targets. Each County must therefore strive to facilitate all types of renewables, where possible, but always subject to the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

We believe that the retrograde step now proposed in the Draft Plan is contrary to obligations of the Council under the recent Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, Section 17. This states:

- (1) A relevant body shall, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner consistent with*
- - (a) the most recent approved climate action plan,*
  - (b) the most recent approved national long term climate action strategy,*
  - (c) the most recent approved national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans,*
  - (d) the furtherance of the national climate objective, and*
  - (e) the objective of mitigation greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State.”*

Carlow County Council is a ‘relevant body<sup>4</sup>’ and while the Climate Action Plan does not set out a specific breakdown in terms of the contribution of individual local authorities to each of the renewable technology targets, it does set out an ambition to almost double the amount of onshore wind deployed nationally. As outlined above we believe the Draft Plan, as it relates to onshore wind, is less ambitious than its predecessor and as such cannot be described as consistent with the most recent Climate Action Plan. For this reason, we believe the Draft Plan as proposed would be in breach of this Act, should it be adopted.

We therefore respectfully request the Council to reconsider its position in relation to onshore wind prior to making and adopting the new Plan.

It is critical that we increase our renewable energy fleet and remove fossil fuels from our society. Onshore wind is essential to meeting targets in our Climate Action Plan 2021 as well as our interim national targets between now and 2030. In light of the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, security of supply considerations are arguably more important than ever before, and highlight the important role onshore wind can play in leveraging Ireland’s uniquely strong wind resource.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed material amendments through the current consultation process. We would be happy to participate in any further engagement on this

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<sup>3</sup> CE report, Volume 1, Section 3.7, Response to CLW-C10-26

<sup>4</sup> “Relevant body” is defined in the Principal Act (Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015) as a “prescribed body” and a “public body” both of which are in turn defined in the Freedom of Information Act 2014, and Freedom of Information Act 1997. The 1997 Act specifically includes local authorities (1<sup>st</sup> Schedule Part 3).

matter, including to discuss any aspect of our response, or to clarify any matters arising, should that be of assistance.

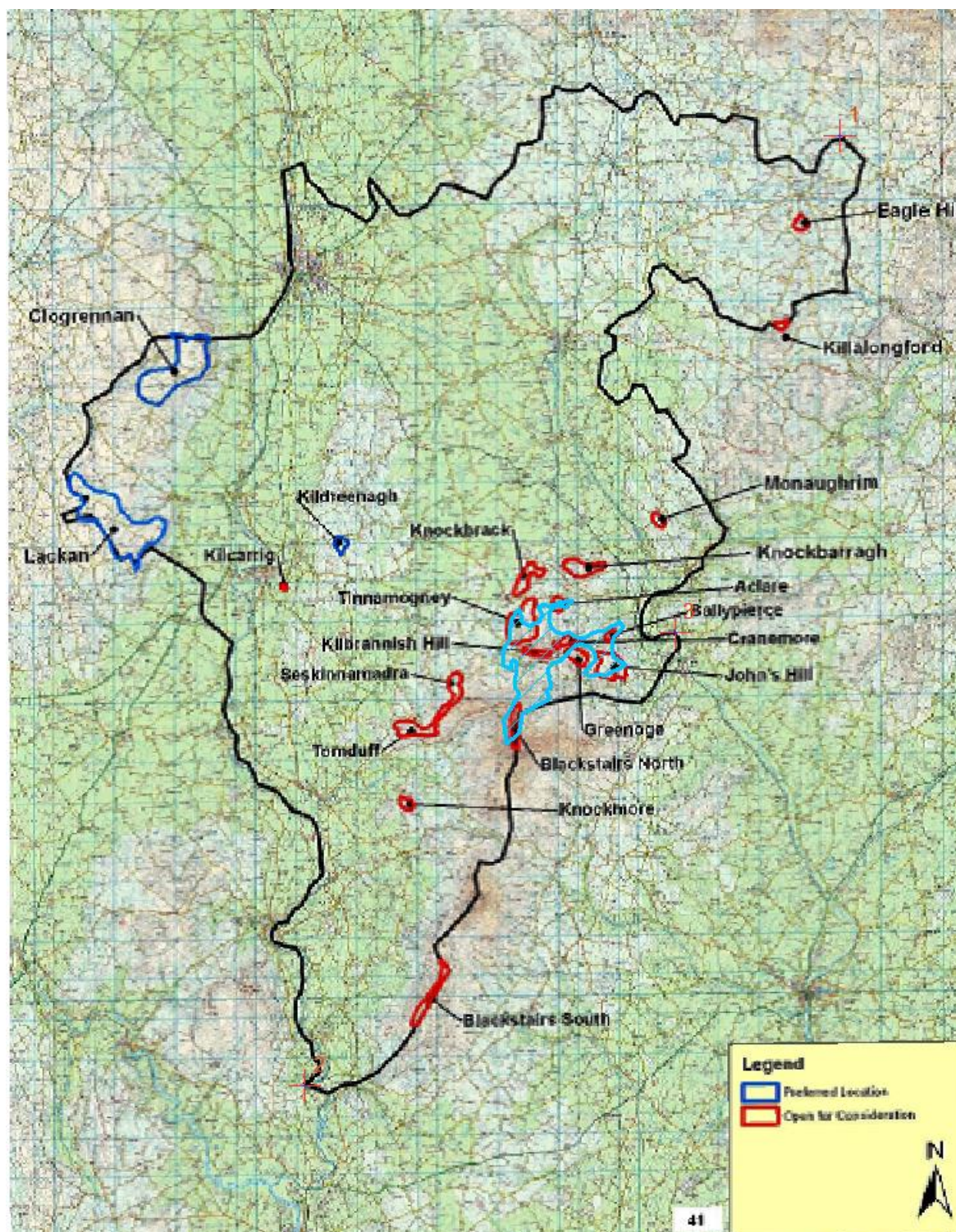
Yours sincerely,

[sent by email]

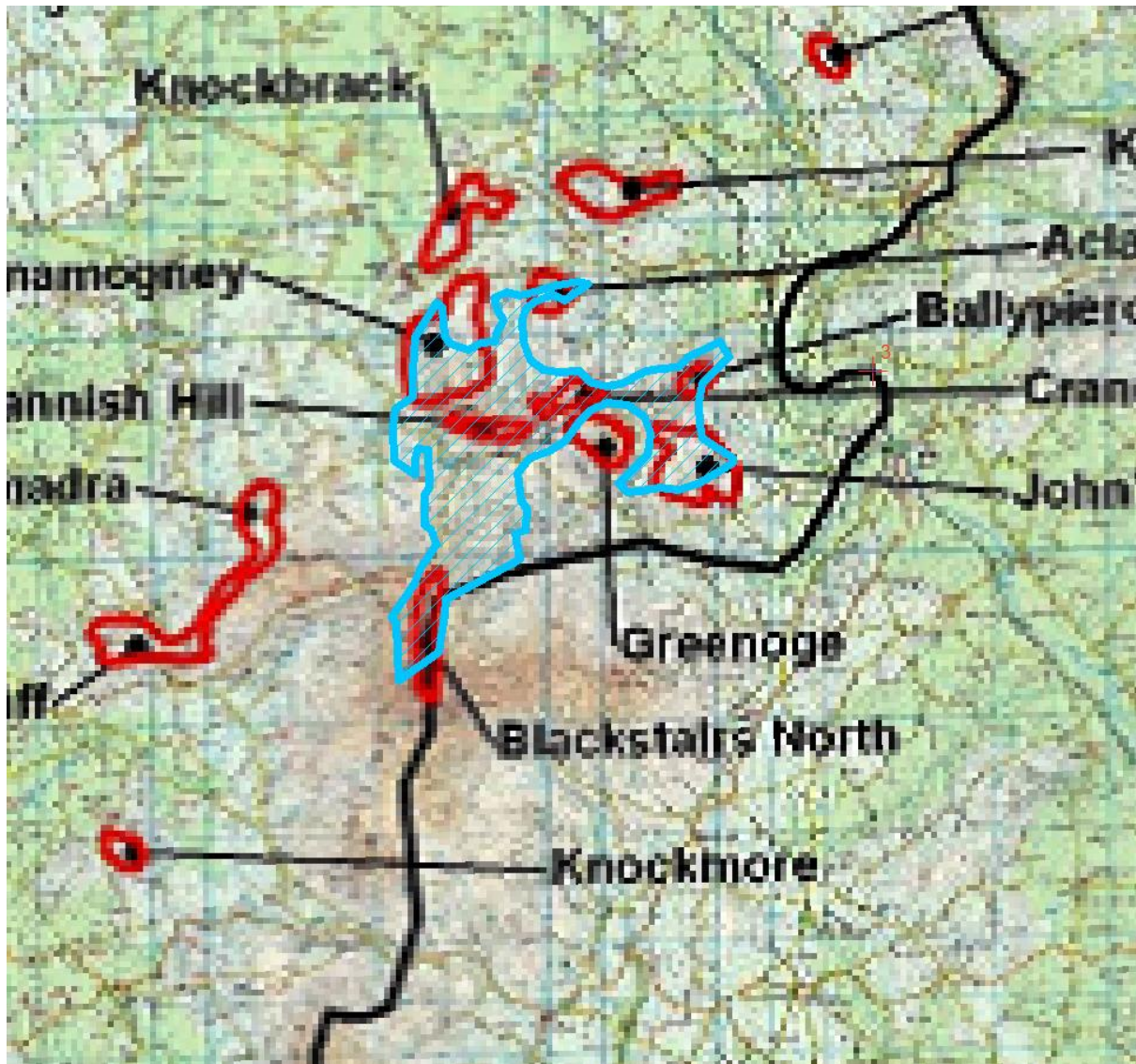
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**Appendix 1:** Current Wind Energy Strategy Map overlaid with the 'Available Area' (Light Blue polygon) in the Southeast of the County only. Available area is extracted from Figure 6.3 of the Draft Plan.







## Appendix 2: Coillte RE Submission on the Draft Carlow Development Plan



Senior Executive Officer,  
Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028,  
Planning Department,  
Carlow County Council,  
Athy Road,  
Carlow

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028**

Thank you for providing an opportunity to consult on the above matter. Coillte is one of the biggest developers of renewable energy in the State and has enabled in excess of 30% of all installed wind farms through wayleaves/rights of way and as a land supplier and developer.

Coillte Renewable Energy business unit (Coillte RE) is in the late stages of transitioning to a new stand-alone joint venture company, in conjunction with the ESB. Once established, this new joint venture entity will be one of the largest dedicated developers of onshore wind in Ireland. The transaction completion is subject to final shareholder approval. A separate submission from Coillte Land Solutions and Forestry on other aspects of the Draft Plan will also be forthcoming.

We note at the outset, and in detail below, that Coillte has specific commercial and development interests in the County.

We welcome the generally supportive policies relating to renewable electricity in the Draft Plan and particularly the inclusion of a Renewable Energy Strategy (RES). The level of detail in the RES, including the identification of wind energy potential (MW), allows for a robust understanding and subsequent debate on the level of ambition of the Draft Plan and is most welcome.

We have a number of concerns in relation to wind energy in the Draft Plan as follows:

1. 'Preferred' and 'Open to Consideration' lands in the current Plan are proposed to be 'Not Normally Permissible' in the Draft Plan. (See Figure 1, Appendix 1).
2. This makes the Draft Plan considerably more restrictive for onshore wind than the current 2015 Plan even though both are based on the same Landscape Character Assessment 2008 (updated in 2015).
3. We strongly contend that more restrictive policies for onshore wind in the Draft Plan, at a time when national policy has increased targets to 2030 is contrary to national policy.
4. Proposed Policy WF P4 makes wind farms 'not normally permissible' on all upland areas and eliminates all 'Available Areas' identified in the RES, Figure 6.3. (See Figure 2 Appendix 1)
5. If the pattern of ambition evidenced in Carlow goes unrecognised, unchecked and unchallenged, the Draft Plan (and others across the country) will hinder rather than chart a path to achieving our national ambitions.
6. Proposed policy WF P4 is unnecessarily restrictive. We request this policy is deleted and replaced with the following which is based on text in the Draft RES (Section 6.1.5.1, pg.40):

*“Any proposals for new wind farms in Uplands areas will need to include a detailed site-specific assessment of both technical constraints and landscape/ visual amenity impacts, including potential to impact on the designated Protected Views and Scenic Routes in the County Development Plan.”*

*Reason: In order to ensure County Carlow maximises its contribution to national onshore renewable energy targets while protecting landscape and visual amenity.*

### **National Renewable Energy Targets and the Critical Role of Onshore Wind**

Coillte recognises the Government’s ambition set out in the Climate Action Plan 2019 and in particular the need for an additional 4,000MW of on-shore wind generation by 2030, in addition to the headline 70% renewable electricity target.

Coillte Renewable Energy seeks to contribute up to 1GW over this period by leveraging a unique land bank which enables the development of an unmatched portfolio of large high-wind sites. Coillte RE would note that the 70% target will not be achievable without a functioning onshore wind sector. There is also likely to be considerable reliance on this sector to deliver our intermediate targets to 2025 and 2027, as required under the EU Governance Regulation<sup>1</sup>.

Given the relatively high likelihood that a significant portion of new offshore capacity will only start to be delivered onto the system post 2027, (and very likely in volumes that may fall short of the targets set out in the National Energy Climate Plan 2020<sup>2</sup>), these immediate targets clearly point to a need to maintain focus on the delivery of new onshore capacity, which will be better placed to support these earlier intermediate targets.

Furthermore there is a strong policy signal that renewable energy ambition levels will only be increasing over the course of the decade and on-shore wind energy will continue to have a lead role. Clear, supportive and equally ambitious policies and objectives are therefore required in County Development Plans throughout the country.

### **Draft County Development Plan – Chapter 7: Climate Action and Energy**

We welcome renewable energy policy RE.P1 which encourages and facilitates the production of energy from renewable sources, such as from wind, solar, bioenergy, hydroelectricity, and geothermal, subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.

We also welcome RE.O1 which seeks to achieve a minimum 130MW of renewable electricity by 2030 via enabling renewable energy developments and through micro generation including rooftop solar, wind, hydro-electric and bioenergy combined heat and power (CHDP). This level of detail, and the MW wind energy potential identified in the RES, allows for a robust understanding and subsequent debate on the level of ambition of the Draft Plan and is most welcome.

In addition we support IF.P1 which facilitates the development, reinforcement, renewal, and expansion of key supporting infrastructure to facilitate renewable energy developments, subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1999&from=EN>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0015c-irelands-national-energy-climate-plan-2021-2030/>



## Draft County Development Plan – Appendix VI: Renewable Energy Strategy,

### Carlow's On-shore Wind Energy Potential and Level of Ambition (MW)

In terms of the methodology in the RES we note and welcome references to SEAI's Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy (LARES) methodology and we particularly welcome the adherence of the Draft Plan to the specific planning policy requirements in the Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change (2017)<sup>3</sup>.

In respect of the sieving analysis in Section 6.1.5, this follows the Wind Energy Guidelines 2019 methodology (unchanged from WEGs 2006)<sup>4</sup> and finds that the capacity for onshore wind (incorporating an assumed delivery rate of 10%) is **18.3MW**. (Section 6.1.5 and Table 6-2.) It also states:

*"... the technical mapping exercise for wind opportunities and constraints in the county is a tool which flags areas of having a higher or lower concentration/distance from various sensitive receptors." (RES Section 6.1.5).*

This is restated in the Draft Plan as follows:

*"The technical mapping exercise in and of itself does not support nor preclude wind energy development. It is a tool which flags areas of having a higher or lower concentration/ distance from various sensitive receptors." (Section 7.10.3.1)*

We note that following the mapping exercise (illustrated in Figure 6.3) the RES examines the potential landscape and visual capacity of different forms of development including wind farms by reference to the LCA produced in 2008 and revised in 2015. As summarised in the 3 bullet points on pg. 39 and 40 of the RES, it is very apparent that there is a fundamental conflict. This fundamental conflict is further highlighted in Section 6.1.5.2 of the RES which observes:

*"In the south-eastern area of the county, close to the border with County Wexford and County Wicklow, where the wind speeds are favourable and where constraints mapping suggests that adequate separation distances to dwellings would be available – see area in blue on Figure 6-3. The landscape type is 'Uplands' therefore potential for new wind farms is affected by the land use policy, which identifies that wind farms are not normally permissible in the 'Uplands' Landscape Type of the Mount Leinster – Blackstairs Mountains LCA."*

The 'utility scale wind resource' for the County up to 2030 is summarised in Table 6.4 of the RES. Based on the land use policy as described in the above quotation, namely that wind farms are not normally permissible in 'uplands' and therefore the entire 18.3MW potential cannot feature in the Table.

<sup>3</sup> *"it is a specific planning policy requirement under Section 28(1C) of the Act that, in making, reviewing, varying or amending a development plan, or a local area plan, with policies or objectives that relate to wind energy developments, the relevant planning authority shall carry out the following: (2) Indicate how the implementation of the relevant development plan or local area plan over its effective period will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation, and in particular wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource (in megawatts)";*

<sup>4</sup> Coillte made comments on this methodology in its submission on the Draft WEGs 2019 and included suggestions in its submission on the Issues Paper as to how it could be updated in the current RES.



The wind resource to 2030 instead relies on the existing fleet (6MW), the consented as yet unconstructed fleet (6MW and described as new wind farms in the Table), the potential for a small number of new wind farms in lowland areas (6MW), extensions to existing sites (6MW) and repowering (6MW). In relation to repowering however the RES notes “the existing fleet is in the 10-15 year age bracket and has an operational life of 20-25 years and so re-powering is unlikely between now and 2030” pg. 42). For this reason we consider the 30MW capacity by 2030 as described in Table 6.4 to be optimistic.

Notwithstanding this concern we note the potential additional wind capacity to 2030 in the Draft Plan (Table 6-4) is 24MW when the ‘installed capacity 2020’ is removed. This represents a potential contribution by County Carlow to the additional +4,000MW wind energy target in the Climate Action Plan 2019 of 0.6% only.

#### Extract Draft RES

**Table 6-4 Utility Scale Wind Resource Summary in Carlow (to 2030)**

	Capacity (MW)	Assumptions
Installed Capacity 2020	6	N/A
Potential from permitted sites, extensions and repowering	18	Permitted site 6MW, Extensions 6MW, Repowering 6MW
New Wind Farms	6	A small number of new wind farms is developed following County Carlow policies
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Overall working target 30MW by 2030</b>

We strongly argue that the level of ambition by Carlow County Council needs to be increased if the massive challenge of reaching 70% renewable electricity by 2030 incorporating +4,200MW of onshore wind has a chance of success. Carlow has the potential to do this if the land use policy is re-examined. This is discussed further below.

Indeed, if the pattern of ambition evidenced in Carlow goes unrecognised, unchecked and unchallenged the Draft Plan, and others across the country, will hinder rather than chart a path to achieving our national ambitions.

#### Finding a Balance between Landscape Sensitivity and Suitable Sites for onshore wind

Apparent conflicts between landscape sensitivities and suitable sites for utility scale wind farms is not unusual in land use planning and Coillte identified this potential issue to the Council in its submission on the Issues Paper dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020 as follows (emphasis added below):

*Based on Coillte’s extensive experience of developing and facilitating wind farms in Ireland we suggest the following recommendations complement the principles in the SEAI document:*

*Each local authority consider/reconsider its Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and identify landscape sensitivities vis a vis renewable energy developments. As above an approach and terminology should be agreed in advance with the Steering group. Such terminology could include ‘Low’, ‘Medium’, and ‘High’ sensitivity. **It is likely it will be necessary to extend current areas suitable for renewables into slightly more sensitive landscape areas in order to deliver on the requirements of the CAP.** However this can still be done while protecting national, regional and locally important landscapes, particularly if a regional / steering group approach is adopted.*

This exact scenario has unfortunately arisen in the Carlow Draft Plan. However, the solution outlined in our Issues Paper submission has not been considered. The Draft Plan / RES accepts rather than tests / challenge the appropriateness of landscape sensitivity in the context of essential on-shore wind national targets. As mentioned previously this culminates in a land use policy (WE\_P4) which proposes a designation of 'not normally permissible' on 'Uplands' which is where the RES identifies 18.3MW of suitable land. WE\_P4 states:

*Wind farm development will not normally be permissible in the Uplands Landscape Type as shown in Figure 6 of the Carlow County Landscape Character Assessment included as Appendix VII to this Plan. This provision shall not apply to micro energy generation and community energy projects as provided for in Section 7.10.3.5, where deemed appropriate and subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.*

This makes the Draft Plan considerably more restrictive for onshore wind than the current 2015 Plan even though the latter was also based on the same LCA.

We strongly contend that more restrictive policies for onshore wind in the Draft Plan, at a time when national policy has increased targets to 2030 is contrary to national policy.

For full transparency we wish to note that Coillte RE has development interests in the county including a live wind farm application (Planning Ref. No. 21/13) comprising 7 wind turbines with an output of up to 38.5MW on lands at Croaghnaun Hill on the northern slopes of the Blackstairs Mountains, approximately 2.5km south east of the village of Myshall and approximately 6km west of Bunclody. This was refused by the Council on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 for 3 reasons namely it was considered contrary to Heritage Policy 1 (which seeks to 'Protect designated Views, Prospects and Scenic Routes in the county as appropriate), Heritage Policy 2 (to only authorise development after the competent authority has ascertained, based on scientific evidence that the plan or project will not give rise to significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary effects on the integrity of any European Site) and thirdly it was considered to have an adverse impact on the local road network that would endanger public safety by reason of a traffic hazard. Carlow County Council's decision is the subject of first and third party appeals and is before An Bord Pleanála for determination Ref. 309937.

In the current 2015 Plan the bulk of the Croaghnaun site is located on lands that are open to consideration and all lands are in an 'Uplands' area. However, these lands are proposed to be 'not normally permissible' under policy WE\_P4 of the Draft Plan.

Similarly other OTC lands, and 'preferred locations' in the west of the County, are also proposed to be 'not normally permissible' in the Draft Plan. The impact of WE\_P4 on the current designations is illustrated in Appendix 1, Figure 1, and the impact on suitable sites identified in the RES is shown in Appendix 1, Figure 2. These comparisons show that the Draft Plan is significantly more restrictive. It eliminates the previous supportive designations and the suitable sites in Figure 6-3 of the RES.

There is no explanation in the Draft Plan for downgrading the current sites other than by reference to the findings of the LCA. However, again and as stated above it is important to note that the LCA was also in effect when these designations were adopted in the 2015 CDP. Given our national renewable onshore energy targets and the limited areas in Co. Carlow at suitable separation distances from residences, we strongly believe that WE\_P4 should be deleted from the Draft Plan.

We understand fully Carlow's concerns in terms of landscape protection and concur that this is a critical factor for consideration. As stated in the RES:

*the potential for new wind farms is therefore affected by both technical factors (mainly achieving adequate separation distances and adequately sized land areas and the need to protect landscape and visual amenity. Any proposals for new wind farms would need to include a more detailed site-specific assessment of both technical constraints and landscape/ visual amenity impacts, including potential to impact on the designated Protected Views and Scenic Routes in the County Development Plan". [RES Section 6.1.5.1 pg. 40].*

It should be noted that there are sometimes/often opportunities in more sensitive landscapes to integrate new and existing wind farms or to find areas of less prominence where wind farms can be appropriately sited without an overall adverse impact. We believe the suggestion in the above quote from the RES is a sensible one for 'Upland' areas and request it replaces WE.P4. This will ensure the maximum wind energy potential for the County is achieved and Carlow maximises its contribution to national targets, while simultaneously ensuring impacts on landscape and visual amenity are considered at a site specific level as an utmost priority. Proposed wording for the new policy is as follows:

*"Any proposals for new wind farms in Uplands areas will need to include a detailed site-specific assessment of both technical constraints and landscape/ visual amenity impacts, including potential to impact on the designated Protected Views and Scenic Routes in the County Development Plan."*

Reason: In order to ensure the Carlow maximises its contribution to national onshore renewable energy targets while protecting landscape and visual amenity.

This new/amended policy coupled with landscape polices in Chapter 9 and in particular LA.P7 will ensure appropriate consideration is given to wind farm proposals in all areas including upland areas but is preferable because it is based on a nuanced consideration of landscape and visual matters at a site specific level.

*"LA.P7: Facilitate, where appropriate, developments that have a functional and locational requirement to be situated on steep or elevated sites (e.g. reservoir, telecommunication masts or wind energy structures) where residual adverse visual impacts are minimised or mitigated."*

It is clear that considerable effort and resources have gone into making the Draft Plan and that in depth consideration has been given to the issues contained therein, including in relation to renewable energy, and we strongly welcome this approach.

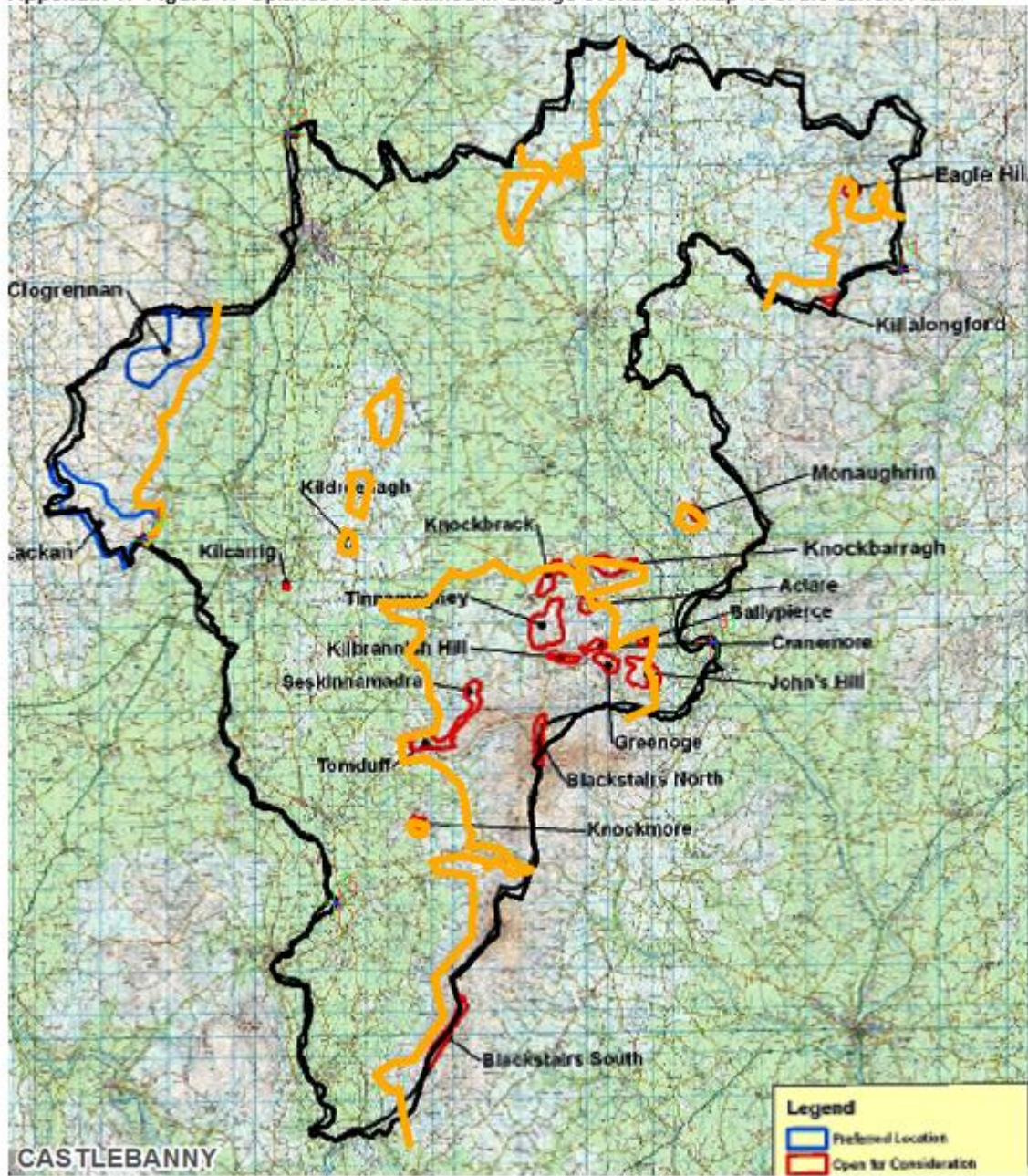
Yours sincerely,

[sent by email]

Sinead O'Malley  
Planning Manager  
Coillte Renewable Energy  
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Appendix 1: Figure 1: Uplands Areas outlined in Orange overlaid on Map 10 of the current Plan.



Appendix 2: Side by side comparison of RES Figure 6.3 and the Landscape Character Map.



