

Oweninny Wind Farm

Oweninny Power Ltd.

Environmental Impact Statement

Chapter 5

Policy & Planning Context

June 2013

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5. POLICY & PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section reviews the policy and planning context relating to the development of renewable energy in Ireland within which the proposed Oweninny wind farm is proposed for development. Renewable wind energy has developed in response to European Union policies and directives and the road map set out by the EU towards achieving targeted reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The requirements of the EU have in turn been integrated into national policy with clear targets set for the energy sector as to the level of penetration of renewable energy into the overall energy mix for the country to be achieved by 2020. Wind energy is recognised nationally as the option most likely to contribute maximally towards achieving these targets which are essential to meet the requirements of Ireland's national climate change strategy. The Oweninny proposed development is fully in line with national, regional and county development policies and guidelines and will be located in a priority area for wind development identified in the Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy 2011 - 2020. The development, when operational, will contribute significantly to a reduction in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions.

5.2 ENERGY POLICY – EUROPEAN CONTEXT

EU renewable energy policy is considered relatively young, having started with the adoption of the 1997 White Paper. It was initially driven by the need to de-carbonise the energy sector and address growing dependency on fossil fuel imports from politically unstable regions outside the EU. However, the focus has shifted in the intervening period from the promotion of renewable energy through indicative targets for the electricity and transport sectors to the definition of legally binding targets supported by a comprehensive legislative framework. More recently focus has been on a reorientation of European energy infrastructure policy that facilitates renewable energy growth.

5.2.1 White Paper on Renewables

Development of renewable energy has been a central aim of EU energy policy for some time with the first step towards a strategy for renewables being the adoption by the EU of a Green Paper in November 1996. This sought views on setting an indicative objective of 12% for the contribution by renewable sources of energy to overall energy consumption by 2010.

This target was subsequently established in 1997 in the EU Commission's Energy for the Future: Renewable Sources of Energy - White Paper for a Community Strategy and Action Plan. The purpose of the White Paper was to contribute, by promoting renewable energy, to the achievement of overall energy policy objectives: security of supply, environment and competitiveness, and to improve and reinforce environmental protection and sustainable development.

The overall EU target of doubling the share of renewables by 2010 implied that Member States had to encourage the increase in renewable energy sources according to their own potential. The setting of targets was recognised as providing a stimulus to efforts towards increased exploitation of available potential and an important instrument for attaining carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions reductions, decreasing energy dependence on fossil fuels, developing national industry and creating jobs.

5.2.2 Green Paper on Security of Energy Supply

Amongst the tools supporting the EU strategy and instruments for promoting renewable energy sources is its Green Paper on the security of energy supply from November 2000¹. EU resources are limited with respect to reserves of oil and gas and costs of coal production are a multiple of the world market price. Correspondingly, there is a potential abundance of renewables.

The aim was to put forward proactive strategies to attenuate, if not counteract, the dependence on imported energy supplies. Future priorities include managing the dependence on supply by development of less polluting energy sources.

New and renewable forms of energy are the first options for action in relation to security of supply, the environment and local populations.

5.2.3 Renewable Energy Directives 2001 & 2009

The EU Renewables Directive 2001/77/EC adopted in 2001 introduced for the first time a legislative text aimed at promoting the production of energy from renewable sources. It obliged Member States to set indicative targets. It committed Ireland to the production of 13.2% of electricity demand from renewable energy sources by 2010.

Based on this target the Irish Government introduced a range of measures to increase the deployment of renewables in the production of electricity.

Outlining a long-term strategy the EU Commission's Renewable Energy Roadmap² called for a mandatory target of a 20% share of renewable energies in the EU's energy mix by 2020. The target was endorsed by EU leaders in March 2007.

The Commission's Energy 2020 Strategy³ highlights how EU infrastructure and innovation policies are supporting the renewable energy sector's development, ensuring that renewable energy sources and technologies become economically competitive as soon as possible, thus supporting the growth of renewable energy to achieve our goals.

The EU Renewables Directive 2009/28/EC, which amended and subsequently repealed Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC, requires each member state to increase its share of renewable energies - such as solar, wind or hydro - in the bloc's energy mix to raise the overall share to 20% by 2020. To achieve the objective, every nation in the 27-member bloc is required to increase its share of renewables by 5.5% from 2005 levels, with the remaining increase calculated on the basis of per capita gross domestic product (GDP).

Ireland's share of renewables is required to increase to 16% by 2020. The Directive set a series of interim targets, known as 'indicative trajectories', in order to ensure steady progress towards the 2020 targets. Each Member State has flexibility to set targets across the heating, transportation and electricity sectors to meet the overall renewable

¹ European Union, Green paper, Towards a European Strategy for the security of energy supply, COM 2000 (769), November 2000

² Commission Communication of 10 January 2007: "Renewable Energy Road Map. Renewable energies in the 21st century: building a more sustainable future" [COM(2007) 84]

³ COM(2010)639/3 Energy 2020: A strategy for competitive, sustainable and secure energy

energy targets, subject to a minimum of 10% of energy use in transport being renewable sourced by 2020.

The new Renewable Energy Directive provides a strong and stable regulatory framework for the development of the renewable energy sector in Europe.

The European Commission (EC) presented its Communication⁴ on 31 January 2011 showing that the 2020 renewable energy policy goals are likely to be met and exceeded if Member States fully implement their national renewable energy action plans and if financing instruments are improved.

5.2.4 European Commission Energy Roadmap 2050

On 15 December 2011, the European Commission adopted the Communication "Energy Roadmap 2050"⁵. This roadmap commits the EU to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80-95% below 1990 levels by 2050 in the context of necessary reductions by developed countries as a group. This implies that Europe's energy production will have to be almost carbon-free in order to reach the Commission's latest target over the next 37 years.

Existing EU policies and measures to achieve the Energy 2020 goals and the Energy 2020 strategy are ambitious and will continue to deliver beyond 2020. However, they will achieve only less than half of the decarbonisation goal set for 2050.

The Energy Roadmap 2050 examines seven scenarios, two "*Current Trend*" and five "*Decarbonisation*", that could reduce emissions while ensuring that each country retains its security of supply and competitiveness.

The high renewable energy sources decarbonisation scenario would see renewable energy systems with a 75% share of final energy consumption by 2050 and 97% of electricity consumption indicative that renewable energy will be central to energy policy going forward.

Ireland's Energy Minister Pat Rabbitte is quoted by Energy Ireland as saying that the roadmap "shows the importance of a fundamental shift away from fossil fuels" and added that Ireland's "abundance of onshore and offshore wind resources" means it is "well placed to feature prominently in the euro-wide energy sector."

5.2.5 Climate Change

Tackling climate change is a key element of the European Commissions energy road map going forward to 2050. Climate change is now an accepted fact and is evidenced by increasing temperature, changing weather patterns, glacial melting rates and sea level rise. Monitoring has shown that the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases, including CO₂, is increasing concerns regarding the effect these may have on the earth's climate as a result of an enhanced greenhouse effect. Despite limited remaining uncertainties, scientists internationally are of the view that the balance of evidence suggests there is a discernible human influence on the global climate as a result of the

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Renewable Energy: Progressing towards the 2020 target

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions, Energy Roadmap 2050

build-up of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

In response to international concerns, under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), industrialised countries were to stabilise their greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. The EU met this commitment. The Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC committed the 15 countries that were EU members at the time to reduce their collective emissions in the 2008-2012 period to 8% below 1990 levels.

Recent statistics show that the level of the EU 27's greenhouse gas emissions has fallen by 15 % from 5.59 billion tonnes in 1990 to 4.72 billion tonnes in 2010.

The EU has also offered to increase its emissions reduction to 30% by 2020, on condition that other major emitting countries in the developed and developing worlds commit to do their fair share under a future global climate agreement. This agreement should take effect at the start of 2013 when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period will have expired.

The Copenhagen Accord reached in December 2009 represents a step towards such an agreement. The EU is pressing for a global deal that is ambitious, comprehensive and legally binding.

Achieving the targets aspired to in the 2050 Roadmap would reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 80 – 95% by mid century.

In the National context the Irish Environmental Protection Agency also highlights its concerns around climate change⁶;

“What is distinctive about the current period of global warming, compared to previous cycles of climate change, is the extent and rate of change, which exceeds natural variation. The impacts of climate change present very serious global risks and threaten the basic components of life, including health, access to water, food production and the use of land. As the earth gets warmer the damage from climate change will accelerate”.

In its report “The EPA & Climate Change”⁷ the EPA also indicates that

“Whilst Ireland can be justifiably proud of our scientific and technological achievements, Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions per person are amongst the highest on the planet and the 2nd highest of the EU 27 countries. The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland and other parts of the globe which is primarily due to the global financial crisis has shown that there is still a strong link between economic growth and emissions.”

The report identifies Agriculture (at 29.2%) as the largest sector in the economy contributing to greenhouse gas emissions with the energy sector being the next most significant at 21%. The EPA foresees that Ireland will face a significant challenge in achieving its targets under the 2020 obligations should increases in agricultural and transport emissions occur.

The National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012 also forecast's annual emissions savings of CO₂ will be achieved on foot of the Government's targets being achieved, see Section 5.3.4 below.

⁶ <http://www.epa.ie/whatwedo/climate/>

⁷ The EPA & Climate Change, Responsibilities, Challenges and Opportunities, 2011 Update

5.2.6 Summary

The development of renewable energy, particularly energy from wind, water, solar power and biomass, is a central aim of the European Commission's energy policy. There are several reasons for this:

- Renewable energy has an important role to play in reducing CO₂ emissions, which is a major Community objective.
- Increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy balance enhances sustainability. It also helps to improve the security of energy supply by reducing the Community's growing dependence on imported energy sources.
- Renewable energy sources are expected to be economically competitive with conventional energy sources in the medium to long term.

It is evident that this proposed wind farm development at Oweninny is strongly supported by policy at European level.

5.3 ENERGY POLICY – NATIONAL CONTEXT

5.3.1 Policy Evolution

It is Government Policy to promote the development of renewable energy sources. Sustainable energy policy includes maximising the efficiency of generation and emphasising the use of renewable resources.

Ireland's Green Paper on Sustainable Energy was launched in September 1999, the policy indicating how Ireland will progress towards meeting its energy requirements in an environmentally and economically sustainable way. It concentrated on Ireland's need to limit energy-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions under the Kyoto Protocol. An additional major justification of this strategy on renewable energy is to reduce Irish dependence on imported fuels for the purpose of security of supply.

The Renewable Energy Strategy Group was formed in November 1999 on foot of the Green Paper. In its report 'Strategy for Intensifying Wind Energy Development'⁸ the Group outlined a strategy of promoting large-scale wind energy projects to achieve efficient deployment of wind energy.

In the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020, it is stated as follows:

"..in economic development the environment provides a resource base that supports a wide range of activities that include agriculture, forestry, fishing, aqua-culture, mineral use, energy use, industry, services and tourism. For these activities, the aim should be to ensure that the resources are used in sustainable ways that put as much emphasis as possible on their renewability."

5.3.2 National Development Plan 2007 - 2013

The National Development Plan 2007-2013⁹ is the largest and most ambitious investment

⁸ Renewable Energy Strategy Group (2000), Government of Ireland, Strategy for Intensifying Wind Energy Development, <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/ADD4AF22-E434-403B-A3A4-87716C9EE7C0/0/RenewableEnergyStrategyGroupReport.pdf>

⁹ Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All

programme ever proposed for Ireland and it sets out the roadmap to Ireland's future.

The Plan outlines a number of High Level Objectives that will guide investment priorities and allocations. These include environmental sustainability, whose promotion, including tackling climate change, is a key objective of the investment strategy in the Plan. Climate Change and Renewable Energy are two of the six identified areas in which investment under the Plan will make a major contribution to the protection and enhancement of the environment.

This Plan sets out objectives to stimulate renewable energy production and notes as follows:

"Ireland has significant renewable energy resources available but their large-scale exploitation continues to require support and intervention by policy makers because of the investment costs and risks entailed. This intervention is required across the three principal energy sectors: electricity, heat and transport and in the industrial, public, commercial and domestic sectors".

"The proposed investments will considerably enhance environmental sustainability. Increased market penetration of renewable energy technologies in the electricity, heat and transport sectors will displace fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gas and peat. In the case of electricity, the 2010 target for renewable energy consumption has been increased to 15%".

The Sustainable Energy Sub-Programme states that renewable energy measures will focus on achieving Government targets for renewable energy production and meeting policy goals with regard to competitiveness, environment, security of supply, R&D and the development of a sustainable All-Island energy market.

In addition it notes as follows:

"Renewable energy measures will focus on achieving Government targets for renewable energy production and meeting policy goals with regard to competitiveness, environment, security of supply, R&D and the development of a sustainable All-Island energy market. The primary focus will be on the large-scale deployment of wind, the emerging potential and deployment of biomass and biofuels, preparatory action on ocean energy and deployment of other technologies such as solar and geothermal technologies. Deployment will be delivered through a range of supports including taxation, direct grant aid and other funding or support mechanisms;"

In the context of Regional Development the regional policy approach embraces the role of other smaller towns, villages and rural areas and states as follows:

Towns, villages and rural areas need to be supported in the development of new areas of economic activity such as: local value added enterprise activities; tourism; local enterprise; services; and renewable energy to both complement the surviving elements of a restructured agri-business/natural resource sector and provide new employment opportunities.

5.3.3 Renewable Energy Development - 2006

The Department for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources holds responsibility

for renewable energy policy in Ireland. The Renewable Energy Development Group, established in May 2004 considered the future options to develop increased use of renewable energy in the electricity market to 2010 and beyond. Its Renewable Energy Development 2006 presented an overview of policy and strategy evolution, stating as follows:

“Renewable energy deployment fits with a range of policy imperatives across many areas. It has clear environmental benefits and helps meet our international environmental commitments. It reduces reliance on imported fuels, reducing dependence and bringing associated economic benefits.”

A conclusion was as follows:

“A sustainable energy economy depends on both efficiency in the supply and consumption of energy and in the substantial deployment of renewable sources.”

5.3.4 Energy White Paper – 2007

The Government launched its Energy White Paper in March 2007. The White Paper describes the actions and targets for the energy policy framework out to 2020, to support economic growth and meet the needs of all consumers. It is set firmly in the global and European context which has put energy security and climate change among the most urgent international challenges.

Sustainability is at the heart of Government’s energy policy objectives. The Paper outlines that the challenge of creating a sustainable energy future for Ireland will be met through a range of strategies, targets and actions to deliver environmentally sustainable energy supply and use. The underpinning Strategic Goals include accelerating the growth of renewable energy sources.

The key targets as set out in Table 5-1 were set regarding renewable electricity.

Table 5-1: National Renewable Energy Targets

Year	Criterion	Target
2010	Gross electricity consumption from renewable sources	15 %
2020	Gross electricity consumption from renewable sources	40 %

The Government’s 40% renewable penetration target for 2020 is estimated to be equivalent to about 4,000 MW of installed wind energy capacity in Ireland. According to the IWEA, installed capacity on the island of Ireland in April 2012 was approximately 2,055 MW, indicating that significant further development is required.

The Government is evidently committed to delivering a significant growth in renewable energy as a contribution to fuel diversity in power generation. Wind energy will provide the pivotal contribution to achieving this target.

5.3.5 National Climate Change Strategy 2007 - 2012

The National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS) 2007 – 2012 of April 2007¹⁰ follows on from the first national strategy, which was published in 2000 and reviewed in 2002. It details the measures by which Ireland will meet its Kyoto 2008 - 2012 commitment. It also

¹⁰ National Climate Change Strategy 2007 – 2012
<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Atmosphere/FileDownload,1861,en.pdf>

outlines how the measures will position Ireland for the post-2012 period.

With regard to renewable electricity production the NCCS states:

“electricity generation from renewable sources provides the most effective way of reducing the contribution of power generation to Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions”.

It is forecast that an annual emissions savings of 3.26 Mt of CO₂ will be achieved on foot of the Government’s 33% target for 2020 and even larger savings will result from the revised renewables target of 40%. Oweninny wind farm, when fully operational, could lead to a reduction in CO₂ emissions of over half a million tonnes through displacement of fossil fuel energy production, see Chapter 12, Section 12.2.

5.3.6 Strategy for Renewable Energy, 2012 – 2020

In May 2012 the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources published the Government’s Strategy for Renewable Energy, 2012 – 2020.

The Strategy notes as follows:

“The Government firmly believes that the development and deployment of Ireland’s abundant indigenous renewable energy resources, both onshore and offshore, clearly stands on its own merits in terms of the contribution to the economy, to the growth and jobs agenda, to environmental sustainability and to diversity of energy supply. In addition, and in support of the Government’s own energy policy objectives, Ireland is committed to delivering on its obligations under European Union Energy Policy which include the binding national target for renewable energy by 2020”.

This document sets out five strategic goals, the first of which is as follows:

“Strategic Goal 1: Progressively more renewable electricity from onshore and offshore wind power for the domestic and export markets”.

The Strategy explains as follows:

“Further strategic deployment of onshore wind projects will develop a base of indigenous and foreign companies and create employment in the short-term in wind farm construction, possible turbine component manufacturing and servicing, the opportunity to capture international supply chain opportunities and the manufacture of niche onshore renewable energy generating equipment. In addition to exporting electricity from renewables to the UK and continental Europe, Ireland has the opportunity to become a recognised world leader in the testing of next generation offshore renewable energy equipment”.

5.3.7 National Renewable Energy Action Plan

Ireland’s National Renewable Energy Action Plan¹¹ (‘NREAP, 2010’) sets out the Government’s strategic approach and concrete measures to deliver on Ireland’s 16% target under Directive 2009/28/EC¹² promoting the use of renewable energy. The NREAP

¹¹ National Renewable Energy Action Plan, IRELAND, Submitted under Article 4 of the EU Directive 2009/28/EC,
<http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/C71495BB-DB3C-4FE9-A725-0C094FE19BCA/0/2010NREAP.pdf>

¹² Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the

was prepared in response to the submission required under the Directive and follows the format (data and questions) required in the template established by the EU. This Directive requires each Member State to adopt a national renewable energy action plan setting out the Member States national targets for the share of energy from renewable sources consumed in transport, electricity and heating and cooling in 2020, taking into account the effects of other policy measures relating to energy efficiency on final consumption of energy.

The Government's ambitions for renewable energy and the related national targets are fully commensurate with the European Union's energy policy objectives and the targets addressed to Ireland under the Renewable Energy Directive. Ireland's energy efficiency ambitions (20% by 2020) as set out in the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan are duly reflected in the NREAP. The Government has set a target of 40% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020 and indicated estimated trajectories towards achieving this, see Table 5-2.

In terms of renewable wind energy the plan estimated that 4,649MW would be required to achieve the stated target for the energy sector.

Table 5-2: National 2020 target and estimated trajectory of energy from renewable sources in heating and cooling, electricity and transport

Year	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
%	6.9	20.4	24.6	25.3	30.5	31.0	32.4	32.2	33.8	37.5	37.3	42.5

The NREAP also set out the policy, technical and financial measures which would be required to implement the plan and achieve the targets.

"It is acknowledged that development of renewable energy is central to overall energy policy in Ireland, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, improving security of supply, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions creating environmental benefits while delivering green jobs to the economy, thus contributing to national competitiveness."

The NREAP also identifies the need for the Irish grid to increasingly cope with the challenges posed by large amounts of intermittent power as the country moves towards meeting the 2020 targets. It states that:

"All key national entities, including the Energy Regulator, the distribution and transmission system operators and the renewable energy sector are working with the Government to deliver the 2020 target through grid connection and grid development strategies".

The plan stresses the need for a fully joined up and integrated approach, involving all appropriate public sector bodies at national, regional and local level as been critical for delivery over the next decade. The challenge posed by the potential introduction in new energy infrastructure is also identified

"..in setting out to achieve a significant transformation of the energy landscape, the Government does not underestimate the challenge (not unique to Ireland) of winning

promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC

the hearts and minds of local communities, in support of the new infrastructure required to deliver change. This challenge will need to be progressively addressed in the context of implementation of the plan”.

The commitment of the Irish Government in facilitating sustainable renewable energy development was also stated in the plan as follows:

“We are working to create the economic, infrastructural and planning conditions conducive to the sustainable development of all of Ireland’s renewable energy resources, which offer the potential for Ireland to become a significant exporter of renewable energy over the coming decades. The Government will continue to work with the European Commission and other Member States to realise Europe’s ambitions for renewable energy, both onshore and offshore”.

5.3.8 NREAP First Progress Report

Ireland submitted its first progress report on the NREAP to the EU Commission in January 2012¹³ indicating the level of progress made and changes towards achieving the national targets. In relation to the energy sector the report indicated that the bulk of renewable energy would likely come from wind energy with a focus on on-shore wind. The estimated contribution from wind energy towards achieving the energy sector 2020 targets was also reduced from 4,649 MW set out in the original NREAP to 3,521 MW due to the downturn in the national economy. The report also indicated that an annual additional capacity of 200 MW of renewable wind energy would need to be added to achieve the national target by 2020 (based on EirGrid indication that 1,637 MW had been grid connected by March 2013)¹⁴.

The development of the proposed wind farm at Oweninny is fully in line with the Governments NREAP and will contribute significantly towards achieving the 2020 target set for renewable energy.

5. 4 REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING AND POLICY

5.4.1 Regional Planning Guidelines

The updated Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2020¹⁵ for the West Region were made by the West Regional Authority on the 24th June 2010 in accordance with the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and the 2009 Regional Planning Guidelines Regulations.

The objective of the Guidelines is to provide a framework for long term strategic development of the West Region for the period 2010 – 2022 in the context of the National Spatial Strategy 2002 - 2020.

¹³ National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), IRELAND, First Progress Report, Submitted under Article 22 of Directive 2009/28/EC, January 2012
<http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/B611ADDD-6937-4340-BCD6-7C85EAE10E8F/0/IrelandfirstreportonNREAPJan2012.pdf>

¹⁴ http://www.eirgrid.com/media/All-Island_Wind_and_Fuel_Mix_Report_March_2013.pdf

¹⁵ Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region, 2010 – 2020,
<http://www.galway.ie/en/Business/WestRegionalAuthority/RegionalPlanningGuidelinesOtherPlans/>

A key aspect of the West Regional Authority's Regional Planning Guidelines is integrating sustainable economic development with the protection and enhancement of the environment. The Regional Planning Guidelines are influenced by a wide range of international, national and regional level plans, programmes and legislation. The Guidelines also establish a framework for other lower level plans and programmes. The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) set out the vision for the West Region and also sets out priorities including those which fall under the Strategic Infrastructure Act, 2006. Local planning policy (namely county, city and town Development Plans) must be consistent with the new Regional Planning Guidelines to ensure that zoning corresponds with population targets as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the West Regional Authority. These targets provide for a sufficient supply of sustainable development to meet the needs of the regional population over the lifetime of the Guidelines.

CO14: Support the identification of suitable wind energy development locations through Habitats Directive Assessment, including consideration of cumulative and in combination effects, landscape character assessments or landscape management strategy and habitat designations (Please refer to CO15 & IO54).

CO15: Initiate a Regional Energy Strategy for the West Region in order to identify suitable and unsuitable locations for new energy projects including networks. The strategy will be informed by Habitats Directive Assessment, landscape character assessments (or landscape management strategy) and other environmental assessment and will include consideration of potential cumulative and in combination environmental impacts (Please refer to CO14 & IO54).

With respect to planning and economic development the Guidelines sets out priority policies and objectives, with two considerations being deemed paramount:

- Productivity and Competitiveness
- Role of Cities/Urban Areas

Actions are listed (Section 3.5.2) to achieve competitiveness in the region. With respect to Section 3.5.2 (g) Renewable Energy the guidelines acknowledge the changing nature of energy supply as driven by resource depletion in hydrocarbons and the concerted global approaches being taken to address climate change. This is identified as providing opportunities and challenges for Irish enterprises over the coming years with forecast growth in the global energy goods and services. Potential activities range from the design, manufacture and installation of advanced equipment and infrastructures, project management and engineering services and solutions and operational management of energy assets and infrastructures.

The potential to harness opportunities in renewable energy in the West Region, due to its natural resources, include wind, wave and wood energy. The following policies and objectives are listed to support renewable energy development taking account of the need for appropriate assessment under the Habitats and Birds Directives as required (See Section 3.1.1 of the Regional Planning Guidelines).

Policies
EDP20: Support the region as a leader in research and development of sustainable renewable energy (Section 3.1.1 applies). (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

EDP21: Support the development of the electricity grid network to facilitate the roll out of renewable energy infrastructure (Section 3.1.1 applies). (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

Objectives

ED08: Subject to Habitats Directive Assessment and/or other relevant environmental assessment, support the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure in appropriate locations (Please refer to CO14, CO15 & IO54).

Section 5.5.4 of the Guidelines states that areas identified for wind farms must have regard to the level of the resource, the nature of the landscape, the status of surrounding lands and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's 'Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006'. It also refers to the need for a Habitats Directive 'Appropriate Assessment' Screening along with other relevant environmental assessments where wind energy developments are proposed in or near a Natura 2000 site.

The development of the proposed Oweninny wind farm is supported by Policies EDP21 and EDP22 and Objective ED08. The Oweninny wind farm proposal has been developed with regard to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's 'Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006'. A full ecological assessment of the potential for impact of the development on the ecology of the site have been undertaken (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7). As the proposed development is located adjacent to special areas of conservation designated under the EU Habitats Directive screening for appropriate assessment has been undertaken also. This is provided as a separate document in the planning application.

The west Regional Authority reported that in the year following the adoption of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010-2022, implementation progressed well. Six of the eight development plans, including that of Mayo County Council had incorporated Core Strategies by the end of the 2011 in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)¹⁶.

5.4.2 Planning Policy - Mayo County Development Plan

Under Part II Chapter 1 of the Local Government Planning and Development Act, 2000, Planning Authorities are obliged to make Development Plans for their functional area every six years. The Mayo County Development Plan 2008 - 2014 came into effect in November 2009 and is the framework document for guiding and controlling future developments in the county.

¹⁶ National Regional Planning Guidelines Implementation, Annual Report, 2011
<http://www.galway.ie/en/Business/WestRegionalAuthority/RegionalPlanningGuidelinesOtherPlans/RPGs%20Implementation%20Annual%20Report%202011%202nd%20April%202012.pdf>

5.4.3 Mayo County Development Plan 2008 – 2014

The Mayo County Development Plan 2008 - 2014 is the current framework document for guiding and controlling future developments in the county. It presents the County Council's vision and strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.

Development Policies and Objectives

The Plan deals with Wind Farm Development in Section 3.1.3 Transport & Public Infrastructure, where the Council's policies and objectives are set out, as follows:

<p>ENERGY Policies</p> <p><i>P / TI-E 1: It is the policy of the Council to support and facilitate the provision of a high quality electricity infrastructure in the County whilst seeking to protect and maintain bio-diversity, wildlife habitats, scenic amenities, including protected views, and nature conservation.</i></p>
<p><i>P / TI-E 2: It is the policy of the Council to facilitate the development of alternative sources of power generation subject to proper planning and sustainable development.</i></p>
<p><i>P/T1-E3: It is the policy of the Council to seek and facilitate the extension of the national 220Kv electricity network in Mayo along with the extension of the associated fibre wrapped ESB broadband loop.</i></p>
<p>RENEWABLE ENERGY Policies</p> <p><i>P / TI-RE 1: It is the policy of the Council to support the National Climate Change Strategy 2000 and reduced energy consumption by encouraging energy efficiency, low energy design and integration of renewable energy techniques into new and existing developments, including the Council's own operations.</i></p>
<p><i>P / TI-RE 2: It is the policy of the Council to encourage the production of energy from renewable sources, in particular from biomass, forestry, wind, solar power, tidal, hydro, wave and geothermal.</i></p>
<p><i>P / TI-RE 4: It is the policy of the County to seek to meet the targets below in relation to Renewable Energy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Target of 50MW of renewable energy electricity capacity to meet the requirements of the EU White Paper on Renewable Energy Directive by 2010</i>○ <i>A Target of 50MW wind connect in conjunction with other Renewable Energy Sources, which would promote Mayo as a CO₂ Neutral for Electricity Generation in the County by 2010</i>
<p><i>P / TI-RE 7: It is the policy of the Council to support community-based windfarm initiatives where they are proposed subject to proper planning and sustainable development.</i></p>
<p><i>P / TI-RE 8: It is the policy of the Council not to allow any development that would interfere with existing Rights of Way of traditional walking routes.</i></p>
<p>OBJECTIVES</p>

O / TI-RE 1: It is the objective of the Council to review the Wind Energy Strategy as a variation of the County Development Plan within one year of adoption of the Plan.

O / TI-RE 2: It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of wind energy in the County on a case by case basis in locations consistent with the Wind Energy Strategy for Mayo, having regard to Government Guidelines and the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

O / TI-RE 6: It is the objective of the Council that there is a community involvement and benefit where possible in any proposed windfarm development in the County.

O / TI-RE 7: It is the objective of the Council to encourage wind energy developments to take place in the following designated areas:

- *Belderg*
- *Ballycastle*
- *Porturlin*
- *Eskeragh*
- *Bellacorrick*
- *Sheskin*
- *Doogary*
- *Louisburgh*

O / TI-RE 8: It is a priority of Mayo County Council to facilitate development of wind energy and other renewable energy sources and in particular community wind farm projects.

The proposed Oweninny wind farm development at Bellacorrick is in line with Energy Policy P / T1 - E2 being an alternative source of power generation. It is also in line with the Renewable Energy Policy P / T1-RE 2 being a wind energy development and will help Mayo County Council achieve its renewable Energy Policy P / T1-RE 4 comprising a development of up to 370 MW of wind energy.

The proposed development comes within the Renewable Energy Objectives O / TI-RE 2, O / TI-RE 6, O / TI-RE 7 (specifically indicates Bellacorrick as a designated place for wind energy development) and O / TI-RE 8.

5.4.4 County Landscape Policy

Mayo County Council's Landscape Protection and Appraisal is discussed in detail in Chapter 10 – Landscape.

5.4.5 Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy

Mayo County Council adopted its Renewable Energy Strategy on 9th May 2011¹⁷. The Strategy sets out a path to allow County Mayo to contribute to meeting the national legally-binding renewable energy targets and clarifies the approach Mayo County Council takes to renewable energy. The Renewable Energy Strategy revises and replaces the Wind Energy Strategy for County Mayo. Its aim is to provide a plan-led approach to the location of renewable energy development in a more focused manner than that outlined in

¹⁷ Forward Planning Section, Mayo County Council Renewable Energy Strategy for County Mayo, 2011-2020

the Wind Energy strategy (2008). All major forms of renewable energy are considered in the Strategy, including wind energy.

With respect to wind Section 3.3.1 Renewable Energy from Wind states that wind power is currently one of the most developed and cost-effective renewable electricity technologies. Wind power is a renewable source of energy and produces no greenhouse gases during its operation.

Policy 3 deals with Strategic Infrastructure and states

“It is the policy of the Council to encourage and assist in the provision of strategic infrastructure at appropriate locations to facilitate the provision and exporting of renewable energy”.

Section 6.4.1 relates to on-shore wind energy and Map 1 of the strategy classifies potential areas for on-shore wind energy development, (reproduced as Figure 5-1). Four classifications are identified:

- Priority Areas are areas which have secured planning permission and where on shore wind farms can be developed immediately.
- Tier 1 - Preferred (Large Wind Farms) are areas in which the potential for large wind farms is greatest.
- Tier 1 - Preferred (Cluster of Turbines) are areas identified as being most suitable for smaller clusters of wind turbines (clusters of up to three to five turbines depending on site conditions and visual amenity).
- Tier 2 - Open for Consideration identifies areas which may be considered for wind farms or small clusters of wind turbines but where the visual impact on sensitive or vulnerable landscapes, listed highly scenic routes, scenic routes, scenic viewing points and scenic routes will be the principal consideration. The Tier 2 classification will be reviewed by the Council following a determination by EirGrid of grid infrastructure for the County.

The Oweninny proposed wind farm site is located within the area classed as “Priority Areas”, which is an area where planning permission for wind energy development has been secured. Its development will contribute significantly to Mayo’s contribution to achieving national renewable energy targets.

5.4.6 Strategic Environmental Assessment – Draft Renewable Energy Strategy County Mayo

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of Plans and Programmes and prior to their final adoption. The requirements for SEA in Ireland are set out in the following national Regulations;

- S.I. No. 435 of 2004 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 and
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended by
 - S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) and

- S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011) respectively.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Draft Renewable Energy Strategy for County Mayo was carried out in parallel to the Strategy by the SEA Team in Mayo County Council with an accompanying Environmental Report prepared by the Forward Planning Section of the Council.

Five Scenarios were considered as part of the alternatives assessed:

Scenario 1: Do Nothing Scenario - Retain Current Wind Energy Strategy and Mayo County Development Plan Renewable Energy Policies and Objectives

Scenario 2: Ad-hoc Planning for Renewable Energy Development

Scenario 3: Off-shore Renewable Energy Development only

Scenario 4: Strategically Planned off-shore and On-shore Renewable Energy Development

Scenario 5: Renewable Energy Development along the Mayo Coastline only

On the basis of the SEA analysis carried out, Scenario 4: Strategically planned Off-shore and On-shore Renewable Energy Development emerged as the most environmentally sustainable of the five scenarios considered.

The analysis also indicated that;

“Although Table 6.4 of the Environmental Report indicated that there is potential for conflict with the EPOs (Environmental Protection Objectives) under this Scenario in respect of Population and Human health; Freshwater, Material Assets including Drinking Water infrastructure, Piers and Harbours and IWAK, Cultural heritage and Landscape, such conflicts are likely to be mitigated by measures put in place to mitigate such conflicts. Scenario 4 also emerges as the alternative most likely to improve the status of the EPO’s particularly those relating to Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna, Marine waters and Ecology, Soils and Geology, Material Assets such as Waste Management Infrastructure and Mayo Forest estate and the Architectural Heritage of the County

Having regard to planning considerations, Scenario 4 is also the option that emerges as the alternative that balances environmental protection with economic and social development. Therefore scenario 4 is the basis that forms the Draft RES”

The draft Renewable Energy Strategy was subsequently adopted on this basis and four classifications developed including “Priority Areas” within which the proposed Oweninny wind farm is located.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Ireland, like many modern economies, is facing a wide range of challenges in energy policy due to a number of factors, including: rising prices of primary inputs (especially fossil fuels), energy and fuel price risk and volatility, energy supply security, greenhouse gas emissions, non-greenhouse gas emissions, rising demand, the requirement to invest/replace grid and infrastructure, and the creation of energy market competition and a single EU market. With these challenges to the fore, renewables policy is also an important issue for Ireland.

Within the portfolio of possible renewables, onshore wind power presents a potential means for Ireland to increase the amount of electricity that is produced by emission-free power generation capacity. Its potential contribution to achieving Ireland's stated renewable energy target for 2020 is set out in Ireland's Renewable Energy Action Plan, with binding targets committed to under the promotion of the renewable energy directive.

Ireland has an abundant wind energy resource and it is clear that there is strong support at multiple levels for the development of renewable sources of energy, such as will result from the proposed Oweninny Wind Farm.

Over the past decade, energy and environment policies have been adopted and realigned to reflect new concerns at national and international levels, to address the new realities in these areas and provide a focus for future actions. These are also reflected in the National Renewable Energy Strategy, the Regional Planning Guidelines and the policies of Mayo County Council.

The development of the Oweninny wind farm will contribute significantly to meeting the commitments of the Government's National Renewable Energy Plan (NREAP) obligation under the renewable energy Directive 2009/28/EC. It is fully in line with the Regional Planning Guidelines and Mayo County Council's energy and renewable energy policies and objectives set out in the current County Development Plan and is located within a Priority Area for wind development as designated by the Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy. The development will also contribute significantly to national greenhouse gas emission reduction and will contribute towards achieving Ireland's national target of renewable electricity generation.

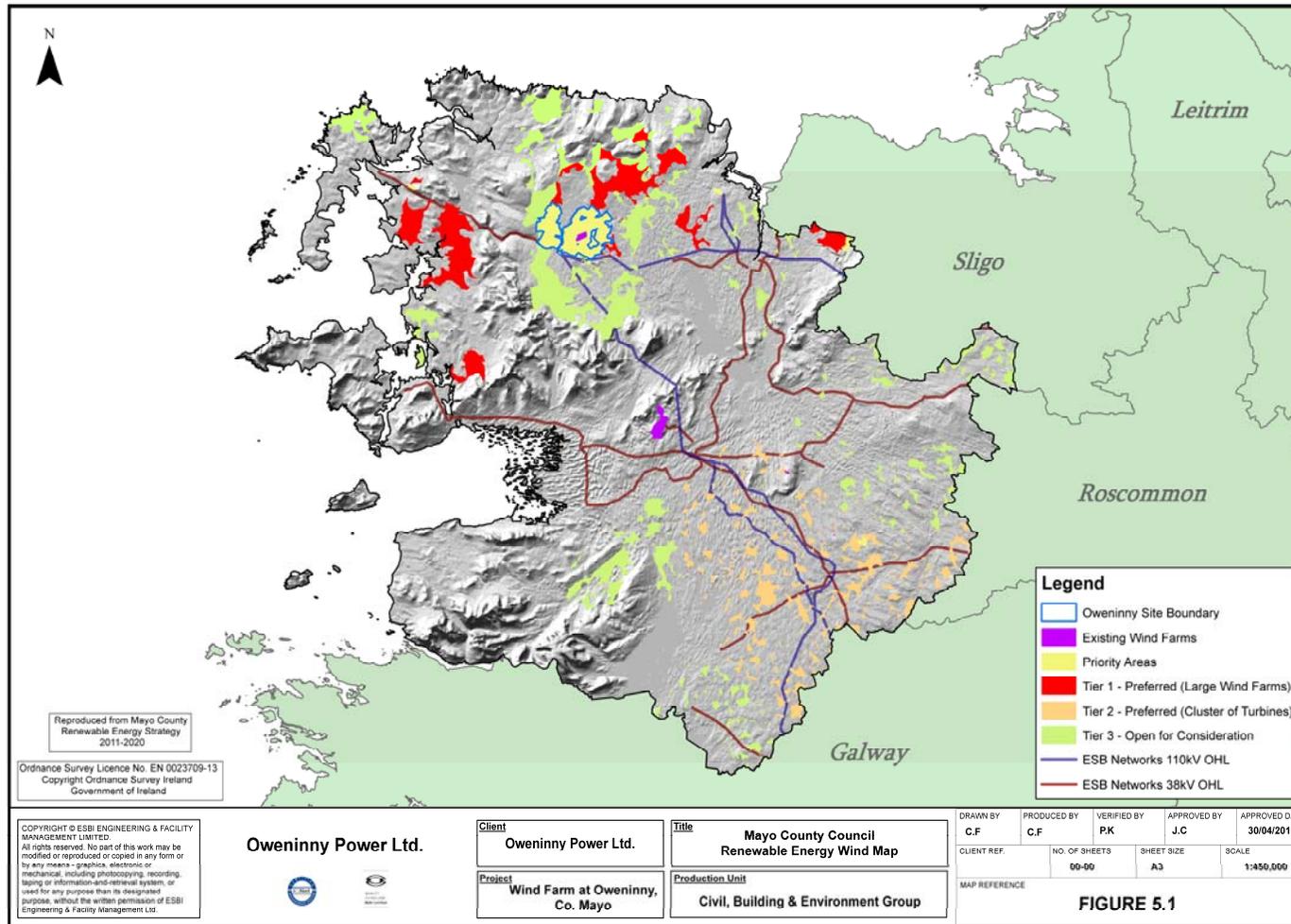


Figure 5-1: County Mayo Renewable Energy Wind Map – (Reproduced from the County Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy)