

10th December 2020.

Curtha faoi bhráid na Comhairle ag Cllr. C. Murphy:

“That;

- i) given the increasingly contentious nature of recent windfarm planning applications,
- ii) the current Wind Energy Development guidelines our planning department are operating under date from 2006,
- iii) the Clare wind energy strategy has not been amended since 2011 and itself uses the 2006 guidelines as reference, and
- iv) given the process for developing the new County Development Plan has begun, Clare County Council request the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage update the Wind Energy Development guidelines immediately.

Furthermore, given the recent environmental disaster at the Meenbog Windfarm development in Co Donegal, despite a comprehensive EIAR being undertaken on behalf of the developer, Clare County Council include as a matter of urgency the recommendation that

- a) all Environmental Impact Assessment Reports and Noise Impact Studies would be designed, undertaken and commissioned on behalf of the environment and proximate communities by the local planning authority, instead of by the developers and
- b) that the developers would pay the local authorities to undertake these reports.”

I wish to reply as follows:

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government issued a Circular letter reference PL 21-13 to local authorities in December 2013 advising that local authorities should defer amending development plan policies in relation to wind energy as part of the Development Plan making process. Instead it was advised that local authorities should operate their existing development plan policies and objectives until the review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 was complete and new Wind Energy Guidelines issued. This continues to be the advice of the Department as reaffirmed in Circular Letter reference PL 5/2017.

In December 2019 the Department issued Draft Wind Energy Guidelines for consultation and Clare County Council made a submission in January 2020. The date for issuing of the final Wind Energy Guidelines has not been provided however it is anticipated it will be in the coming months. The wind energy policies of the County Development Plan will be reviewed as part of the preparation of the new Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028 should the new guidelines be issued within the timeline for preparing the new plan.

In respect of your recommendation that Local Authorities carry out expert reports on behalf of private development proposals this is not appropriate as the planning authority must remain independent in carrying out its statutory planning functions.

Liam Conneally,
Director of Service.