

Mourne AONB Against Wind Farms

Connaire McGreevy

1. "Mourne AONB Against Wind Farms" is a local group with huge concerns about the proposed wind farm in our locality. The group is made up of residents from the Hilltown area who are interested in protecting our local environment against investment driven companies who wish to capitalise for their own financial gain on our greatest natural resource.
2. We are deeply opposed to the creation of a forest of steel in the Mournes and the industrialisation of the stunning and spectacular scenery of our area.
3. In May 2013 An Bord Pleanála refused planning permission for a 5 turbine windfarm in the Cooley Mountains as "it would damage the visual amenity of the area and interfere with the character of the landscape".
4. Last year, a wind farm consisting of 16 wind turbines, on the outskirts of Swansea in Wales had plans blocked as it would have "degraded and destroyed this beautiful area by industrial development".
5. In August, in Tyrone, a plan for 8 turbines (126.5m) was not passed for reasons which included the impact of the proposal on habitat, the effect of noise on residential properties, the visual impact of the wind farm and the significance of the economic and social benefits offered by the wind farm.
6. ABO Wind's application is for 12 turbines of 125m. Insert image – XX. This is a size comparison of the wind turbines with a well-known London landmark, the London Eye. Its height is 135m. As you can see they are HUGE. Also they will be placed on a prominent hillside, which will make them look even larger. Critical views of the windfarm would be seen in all directions.
7. This is the first application for a significant windfarm in this area, Mourne Mountain AONB. To quote Minister Durkin on wind farms planned for AONB's "In such sensitive landscapes, it may be difficult to accommodate wind turbines without detriment to the Region's cultural and natural heritage assets".
8. Destination Mourne Mountains is one of the 9 key tourism destinations in N Ireland. – "the core strengths of the destination are the scenery and landscape associated with the mountains, hills and sea and the easy

accessibility to the mountains. Outdoor recreation is at the heart of the future of sustainable development of the Mournes.

9. There is a suggestion in the Environmental Statement that windfarms are a "tourist amenity". There is no evidence that would support this statement and that additional windfarms may "draw visitors to the region".
10. Research from Scotland provides evidence that mountain goers do not want to pursue their activities and spend their money in areas they regard as spoiled by industrial scale windfarms. They are changing their behaviour to avoid such areas.
11. Gruggandoo is an Area of Special Scientific Interest (368) and adjoins the site of the farm. It is dominated by priority and protected species - upland heathland and particular grasslands and there is a high predicted collision risk for Red Kites.
12. Impulsive infrasound (inaudible intermittent noise) produced by wind turbines is hugely damaging to human health. This can be particularly problematic for infants and the elderly or for children or adults with special needs.
13. Researchers studying wind-turbine syndrome recommend a larger buffer zone around wind farms to protect people from any ill effects. The minimum distance the Scottish government, among others, recommend wind farms should be located 2km from the radius of the turbines away from established communities.
14. Case of Julian and Jane Davis, England, who successfully obtained a £2 million out of court settlement from a wind farm operator, for noise nuisance; and the resultant loss of property value (the home became uninhabitable due to low-frequency noise, infrasound and vibration).
15. Let us remember the wind turbine collapse at the Screggagh Wind Farm in Tyrone last January being a classic example of one of the dangers of living so close to a turbine.
16. The scale and mass of the proposed turbines would be over whelming on this important landscape in the Mournes. The benefits do not outweigh the significant harm and adverse impacts that the development would have:
 - a. Visual impact on the high scenic value of the area
 - b. Impact on AONB sensitive landscape and the character of the area
 - c. Impact of shadow, flicker and noise

17. These turbines will be blight for generations to come. Even after their operational life of 25 years is over, we will be left with massive concrete and steel foundations littered across the land, which will never be removed.
18. Approving this application would seriously undermine all current efforts to promote and protect this area. If allowed the application will set a precedent for wind turbine development in the Mourne Area which is one of the most iconic AONB's in NI. An un-spoiled area, which is the reason why it is valued more and more by those who come to enjoy it.
19. The Council needs to protect our beautiful landscape from industrial development. Protect our growing tourism industry. Do not sacrifice it.

Hilltown Community Association

Martina Byrne

HCA aims to develop and deliver projects to improve the village and the wider Clonduff parish.

1. As the representative community group in the village, we have had no success to date in our attempts to meet with ABO Wind to discuss their application and answer the many questions our residents have. It has been of benefit to finally be in the same room as the applicant.
2. Back in January this year, ABO Wind avoided a public consultation meeting and staged a presentation of information. Residents were allowed to look around their display. That was the first and last time there has been any consultation with the Community.
3. There are huge concerns on the impact of this invasive industrial scale project on our area and the impact on resident's lives on living so close to a windfarm.
4. There are questions raised on how adequate the Environmental Statement is. Some of the ongoing representations with Planning officials have opinions which conflict the report and state that in some areas the research is skewed.
5. The report also states that the introduction of the wind farms "would not irreversibly or permanently alter the character of the landscape and it would be easily returned to its existing condition". Can ABO give an example of this?
6. Our Association is involved in varied projects to develop the village and the wider area e.g. walking tourism. One key projects is the work on Geotourism and the Mourne Cooley Gullion Geopark. This is leading to securing UNESCO status for this area. Will the potential of Hilltown be damaged by the industrial wind farm development?
7. Given that our key economic driver is tourism and the points earlier made about the effect wind energy development has on tourism, we need to safeguard our tourism assets from all inappropriate developments.
8. What will be the long term sustainable and economically beneficial development for the area? Tourism or the wind farm?

9. There is an extremely low level of public awareness of this proposal. We feel it is rushed – timing of this application coming in at time of Council reform. What are the additional requirements from July of this year, with a Community Consultation Process?
10. ABO wind granted a Local Electrical Discount Scheme to assist with energy costs to some houses living in close proximity of the site. But the subsidies for wind farms are borne by the domestic tariff on electric.
11. There is talk of a “Community Benefit Fund” but no information on how and what way this will be managed and is it for the Hilltown Community? We were told that this will all be sorted when planning is approved.
12. The rates due to the Council are approx. £140k a year.
13. But let’s make a decision, not on the rates that would be received by the Council or the Community Investment Fund but solely on the same criteria applied to every other form of planned development and the cost benefit analysis of the application.
14. This development comes at a high cost to our community and its future. The wind farm company and its investors will make money from the wind that is free and less than a dozen landowners will benefit.
15. This area is a priceless asset. It should not be “sold out”.