

## Locals query why met masts are still standing near Kilmac



In August, BSB Community Energy Ltd announced that it wouldn't proceed with its "current proposal" to erect giant wind turbines in the area of Bonmahon, Ballylaneen and Stradbally.

CONCERNED locals have queried why two wind/met masts are remaining in place near Kilmacthomas despite a decision to scrap a controversial wind farm proposal.

In August, BSB Community Energy Ltd. announced that it would not proceed with its "current proposal" to erect giant wind turbines in the area of Bonmahon, Ballylaneen and Stradbally.

However, Waterford City & County Council granted planning permission for the retention of two wind/met masts in the Ballygarran/Garranturton area of Kilmacthomas.

Local campaigner Ann Troy has queried why the masts must remain in place if the controversial proposal is not proceeding.

"While our communities are attempting to overcome the past months of distress and worry for fear of industrial scale wind turbines surrounding our homes, residents can't help but wonder why the two wind/met masts in our locality need to stay erected for a further two years," she said.

"We are aware that retention has been granted by Waterford City & County Council for this duration. From calls, queries and feedback, people are concerned as to the need for these masts to stay in place. In keeping informed and updated on this situation, we have determined the truth and facts from the recent copy of the Planning Report from Waterford City & County Council."

She pointed out that the Planning Report states that a further two years of operation for the masts is required due to the requirements of the Leader funding programme.

"How could Waterford Leader allocate a loan or grant to the amount of €49,305 to a 'Community Project' with absolutely no contact or consultation whatsoever in our community?" she said.

"It seems now that this project has been confirmed as being abandoned. Surely public funded monies and grants need scrutiny in the public interest. Although we have tried several channels and contacts in asking these questions, to date we have no concrete responses."

Ann Troy described the two masts as "white elephants" and "a total waste and disregard for public funded monies, with only nuisance value to us as a community".

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin Councillor for the Comeragh District Declan Clune has accused Fianna Fáil of double standards when it comes to protecting rural communities from the "blight" of wind turbine projects.

In late September, Fianna Fáil voted against Sinn Féin's Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2016, a Bill which Cllr Clune says Fianna Fáil supported back in 2014.

He said: "The Bill was designed to put a legal framework around wind farm development by providing for a setback distance of ten times the height of the turbine, along with provisions to protect against noise and shadow flicker. The Bill also allowed for both optional community ownership and greater consultation."

He added: "This is against the backdrop of recent events in the Bonmahon, Stradbally and Ballylaneen areas of the Comeragh

District which were threatened by the imposition of 150m high wind turbines.”

In July, 30 members of Waterford City & County Council (including all members of Fianna Fáil present) voted unanimously to amend the county development plan to take account of new setback distance guidelines.

“At national level, Fianna Fáil have done the opposite,” claimed Cllr Clune, who said the party had cited the upcoming Wind Energy Guidelines as their preferred mechanism for dealing with wind farms.

“We have been waiting many years for these guidelines and the Minister for the Environment Denis Naughton TD is on record in the Dáil confirming that these guidelines will not be legally binding, so rural Ireland is therefore denied legal protection against large scale wind turbine developments in the future,” said Cllr Clune.

“There is a dire need for a firm legal framework for wind farm development to safeguard our rural areas and the two-faced hypocrisy of both Fianna Fáil and the government are making this impossible. By opposing this bill, Fianna Fáil have rejected reasonable proposals to protect rural communities from unregulated wind development