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RE: “Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027”

A Chara,

Statkraft Ireland Limited (Statkraft Ireland) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to Offaly County Council (OCC) on the notice of the publication of the Draft Offaly County Development Plan (OCDP) 2021-2027. This submission has been prepared pursuant to the public notice inviting written observations and comments from interested parties.

Statkraft Ireland is part of the Statkraft group. Statkraft is a leading company in hydropower internationally and is Europe’s largest generator of renewable energy. The Group produces hydropower, wind power, solar power, gas-fired power and supplies district heating. Statkraft is a global company in energy market operations. Statkraft has 3600 employees in 15 countries. As a Norwegian state-owned utility, Statkraft is a solid, dependable partner, committed to playing a leading role in the Irish Energy Market.

Statkraft Ireland develops, owns and operates renewable production facilities and is also involved in the trading and origination of power from our own projects and those of third parties. Statkraft Ireland’s aim is to play a significant role in Ireland’s transition to becoming a low carbon economy.

As a member of the Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA), Statkraft Ireland supports the IWEA response to this consultation process and would like to highlight that each Local Authority has a part of play in Ireland’s Future climate ambitions and central to this – achieving 70% renewable electricity by 2030.

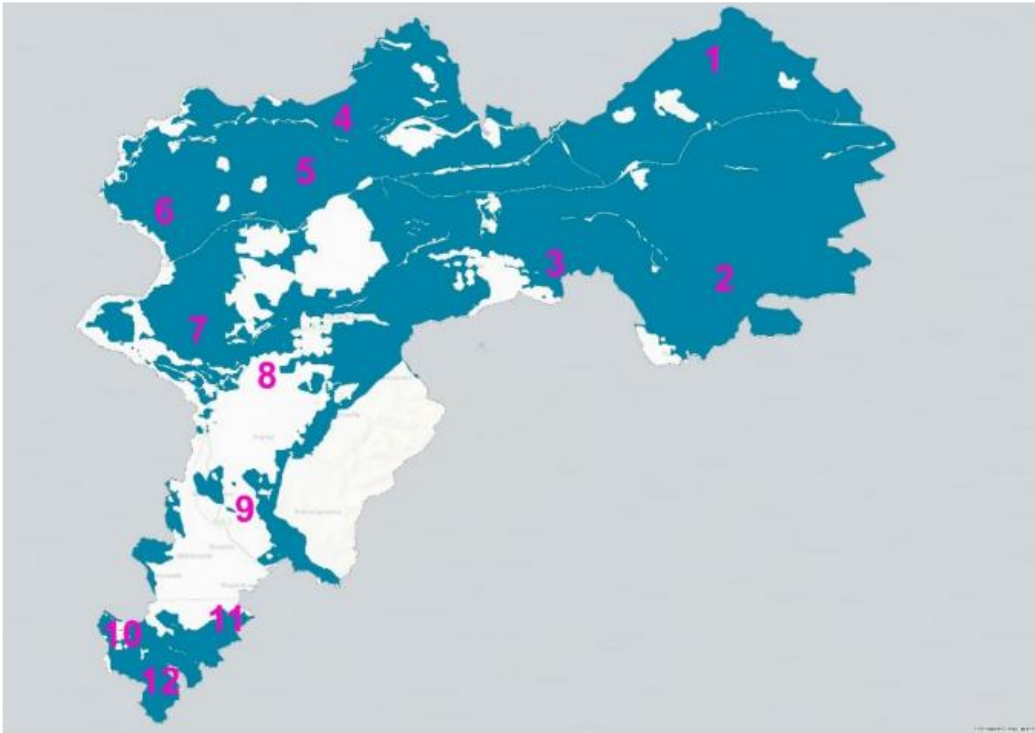
Statkraft notes that within the draft Plans Wind Energy Strategy (WES), OCC state that it is an objective of the Council to *“Support wind energy as a renewable energy source which can play a vital*

role in achieving national targets in relation to reductions in fossil fuel dependency and greenhouse gas emissions” From reading through the selection criteria for designating areas open to consideration for wind energy projects, it is clear that OCC are supportive of wind energy or meeting our targets for wind energy generation out to 2030.

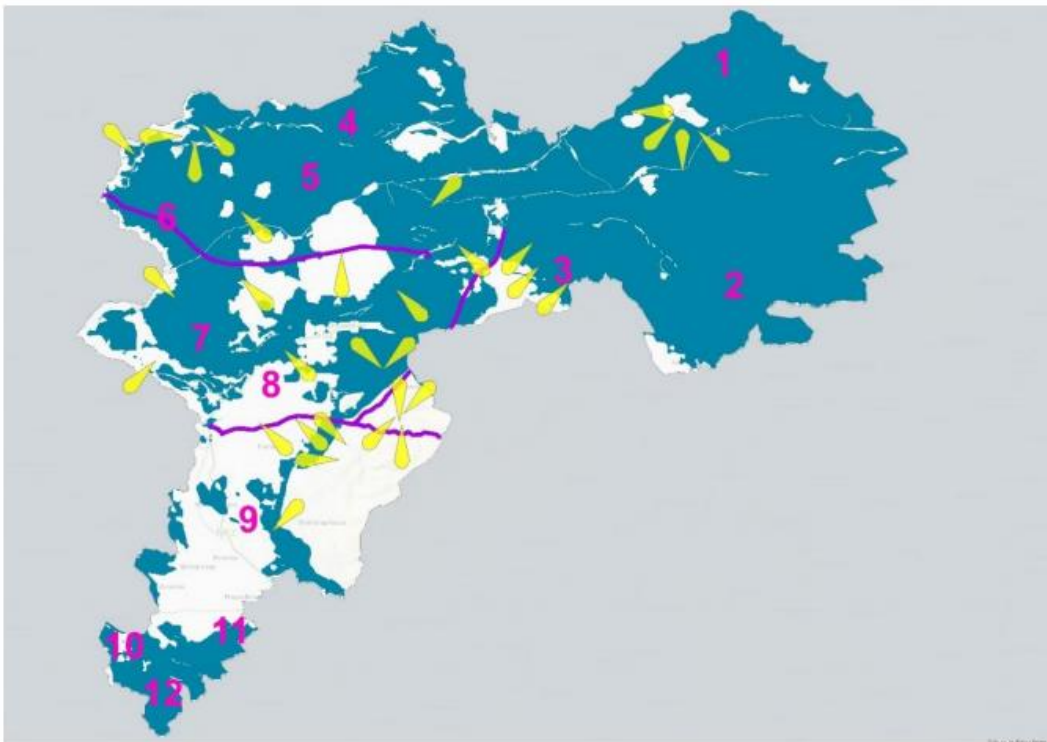
However, the strategy which OCC has used to decide which areas of the County should be zoned for wind energy development is not in line with the current or draft Wind Energy Guidelines and this will be elaborated on, below.

Statkraft note that and are delighted to see that OCC have not used proximity to the National grid network as a constraint which we believe to be a developer’s constraint and not a limiting factor for Local Authorities to use when developing wind energy strategies. We also note that OCC have used landscape sensitivity, scenic views, designated areas (Natura 2000 and Areas of High Amenity) and wind speed as constraints in determining areas suitable for wind energy development within Offaly. Statkraft is of the opinion that windspeed is a developer’s constraint and that this should not be used by Local Authorities when considering areas for wind energy projects. It is clear that advances in wind turbine technology over the past number of years has led to the development of turbines which are capable of exporting energy from areas where there are lower windspeeds. Statkraft would ask that OCC remove this from the sieve mapping process given these advances as it sterilises areas which would otherwise be suitable for development. Statkraft also believe that areas designated for nature conservation should also not be automatically excluded from accommodating new or repowered wind energy projects. This is because, for example, in such constraints-led studies, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) would typically be deemed unsuitable. However, there is greater than 1GW (1,000MW) of wind energy developments currently in operation in SPAs within Ireland.

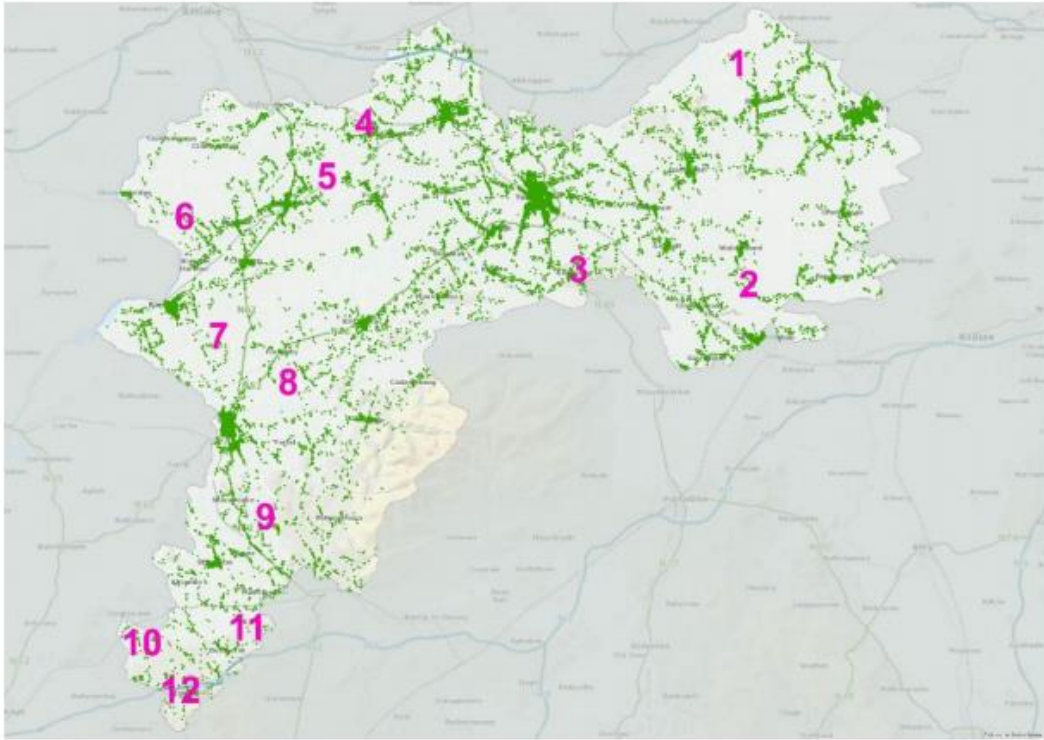
There is also a significant disparity between maps 7 and 8 (Potential Wind Energy Areas showing scenic views), and map 10 (Wind Energy Strategy Designations) of the wind energy strategy where maps 7 and 8 show a significant area of land which has “wind energy potential” however map 10 showing areas “open to consideration” is significantly less.



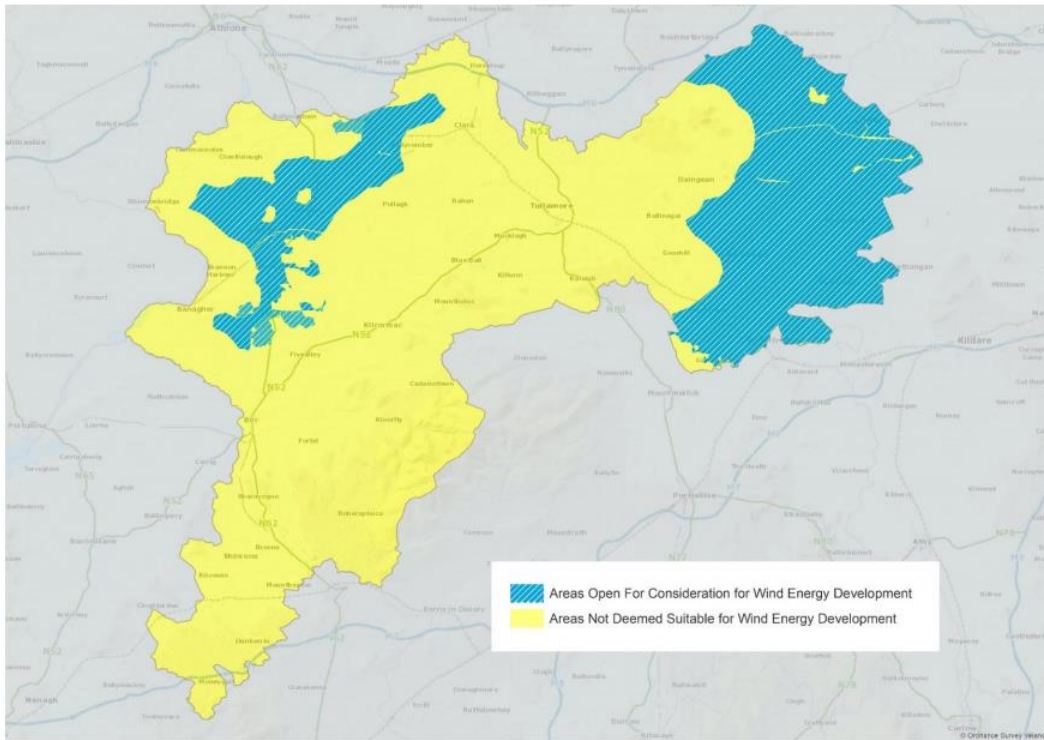
Map No. 7: Potential Wind Energy Areas (12)



Map No. 8: Protected Views and Potential Wind Energy Areas



Map No. 9: Patterns of residential density based on Geodirectory data, Q3, 2019



Map No. 10: Wind Energy Strategy Designations

It appears from reading section 6 of the WES within the draft Plan that of the 12 areas outlined in map no 9 (which are not clearly defined) six of these areas are deemed unsuitable for wind energy development based on scenic views or as a result of one-off housing and settlements within them and this criterion has been used to sterilise further areas for wind energy potential. The amount of

land that has been sterilised as a result of the scenic views within the 12 land regions appears to be overly onerous and Statkraft would request that OCC make it clearer how this was defined. It should also be any wind farm developments will comply with the setback limits as adopted in the 2006 Wind Energy Guidelines and the new Guidelines that are due to be adopted shortly, as such these areas should not be ruled out but assessed on a case by case basis.

In relation to the setback from houses and settlements, this is not in line with the current (500m setback requirement) or draft Wind Energy Guidance from December 2019 which stipulates a setback of 4 x tip height from the nearest residential receptors and does not specify any specific setbacks or restrictions for wind developments from settlements. Again, Statkraft believe this is a developer's constraint and should not be defined by the Local Authority when considering areas for wind energy development and we would ask that this be removed, and the wind energy map updated by OCC in advance of the adoption of the final OCDP.

To compound the above, Chapter three, CAEP-35 also states:

"It is Council policy that in assessing planning applications for wind farms, the Council shall:

- (a) have regard to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (or any update of this document) including applying appropriate setback distances as identified in the Guidelines;*
- (b) have regard to 'Areas Open for Consideration for Wind Energy Developments' in the Wind Energy Strategy Designations Map from the County Wind Energy Strategy;*
- (c) require a 2 km separation distance from turbines to town and village settlement boundaries in the county;*
- (d) have regard to Development Management Standard 109 on wind farms contained in Chapter 13 of this Plan; and*
- (e) have regard to existing and future international, European, national and regional policy, directives and legislation"*

Point (c) states that there should be a setback of 2km from town and village boundaries to wind energy developments which is in direct conflict with point (a) and the current and draft wind energy guidelines and is an unwarranted setback which cannot be justified. SK would ask that this setback be removed from the OCDP and brought back in line with the National Guidance available.

Page 8 of Draft Wind Energy Strategy states that:

"In line with the Climate Action Plan 2019, Ireland aims to increase reliance on renewables from 30% to 70% adding up to 8.2 GW of renewable onshore wind energy capacity by 2030". Using Offaly share of the national population from Census 2016, 1.63% as a proxy, as a minimum County Offaly is required to generate 133.66 MW of renewable energy by 2030...there are an additional 4 permissions in place for windfarms, which if constructed, will bring the total output in Offaly to 336.3 MW"

OCC are also using population numbers for Offaly as a % of the total Country to calculate their assumed % share of our 2030 targets (8.2GW) and have estimated this as 1.63% of the this target e.g. 133.66MW. To compound this, OCC also state that there is already 98.5MW built and 237.8MW consented wind projects within the County giving Offaly a total of 336.3MW of Projects and therefore over and above the Counties quota based on this metric. SK believe that OCC are trying to renege on any material participation with our National Targets and using an unfairly justified metric to calculate the % share of the 8.2GW of wind energy that will be required to meet our targets out to 2030. Population is not a justified measure of the % share of the wind energy required that a County should be using and has not been cited in any guidelines to date.

There is precedence for the Department to issue Ministerial Directions where proposals in a CDP are not in compliance with the issued guidance, and our National policies and objectives. This has happened previously in Westmeath in relation to setback distances from dwellings and we request that OCC remove the proposal in relation to 2km setback to towns and villages.

Moreover, in its Departmental Circular PL5/2017 (August 2017), the DHPLG reminded members of Local Authorities of their statutory obligations and that in making development plans, they must address renewable energy related policies and objectives when considering the proper planning and sustainable development of an area.

The Minister issued along with this Circular 'Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy & Climate Change (July 2017)' which focus on administrative procedures which should be carried out by planning authorities in the context of any review to a development plan. The provisions of these Interim Guidelines require local authorities to:

- 1) Ensure overall national policy on renewable energy is acknowledged and documented in the relevant development plan or local area plan;
- 2) Indicate how the implementation of the relevant development plans 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); and
- 3) Demonstrate detailed compliance with item 2 in any proposal by them to introduce or vary a mandatory setback distance or distances for wind turbines from specified land uses or classes of land use into their development plan or local area plan. It shall also be a material consideration in the required SEA, when taking into account likely significant effects on climatic factors, in addition to other factors such as landscape and air, if a mandatory setback or variation to a mandatory setback proposed by a planning authority in a development plan or local area plan would create a significant limitation or constraint on renewable energy projects, including wind turbines, within the administrative area of the plan.

Offaly County Council in its preparation of the new OCDP has a vital role to play in establishing a proper forward planning strategy for wind energy development and supporting key national policies at a local level. Statkraft encourages the Council to present a clear strategy in relation to wind energy development which has a consistent approach with the relevant guidelines to allow for the

identification of geographical areas for wind energy development and securing the maximum potential for wind energy resources in Co. Offaly.

Statkraft Ireland are committed to working with OCC and all Local Authorities, Government bodies and the public to deliver renewable energy projects that will deliver climate action and that are suitable and appropriate in the local context. Statkraft believe OCC has a responsibility to develop a substantive wind energy strategy for the County that does not incorporate setback policies which essentially sterilise any areas which are open to consideration for wind energy development.

All counties, including Offaly have an opportunity now to embrace the transition to a low carbon society. Renewable electricity can play a leading role in the sustainable development of the county in the coming decades. Embracing the development of all forms of renewable electricity will lead to a better quality of life for the people of Offaly in the decades to come. This is not only through the County delivering effective climate action and tackling the potentially catastrophic effects that we are advised that climate change will have if not addressed, but also in delivering millions of euros to local communities which would assist the people of Offaly in adopting low carbon solutions and also developing the sustainability of rural living.

Statkraft Ireland is committed to developing suitable and appropriate renewable energy projects in line with the CAP and climate emergency. OCC has a responsibility to offer developers every opportunity to bring forward projects that can deliver climate action.

Mise le Meas,



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