SITUATION ANALYSIS

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Spring 2021

EARNING LOCAL SUPPORT

FOR

WIND ENERGY PROJECTS IN IRELAND

This RDD Programme is led by AstonECO Management ltd., and peer reviewed by NUIG.

astoneco management

NUI Galway OÉ Gaillimh

WHAT ARE THE UNDERLYING CHALLENGES
TO EARNING LOCAL SUPPORT FOR WIND ENERGY PROJECTS?

NEIGHBOURS

SUPPORT

DEVELOPER

AUTHORITIES

The content of this document provides tangible examples of what host communities want to be addressed by the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) process and other initiatives aimed at significantly improving best practice around how energy projects are being developed.

Spring 2021

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seai SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

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1. THE ROLL OF THIS SITUATION ANALYSIS

The February 2021 ESRI local support paper[1] that has made headlines makes the business case to examine the situation on the ground, and to adapt the current business model. It clearly documents that the costs and delays to achieve the national renewable energy targets will be high without community buy in.

There are a few different answers out there to: 'What are the underlying challenges to Earning Local Support for Wind Energy Projects?'. Experience has shown that it is the process of enabling concerned people to co-create the answer that is more important than the answer itself. This statement annoys many hard-working people. Yet it is founded in the basic DNA that makes us all tick: humans want to be involved in decisions that impact us.

To create this document is a way that helps us understand each other, the lens of the analysis is through the eyes of people who acknowledge there is a challenge to be addressed. People in homes the turbines 'want to' move in beside, the wind energy developers making the turbines happen, and those in or close to government and semi-state bodies who are making policy and providing the legislative frameworks. Conclusions are not drawn in this document, nor are final solutions proposed. Simply, together, the voices paint the challenge needing addressing. Once we are all around the table having fully heard each other, the solutions will come.

Often, by sympathizing with our 'opponents' - through understanding the challenges, fears and aspirations of the people we can impact, or who can impact us - the potential for partnership can be unveiled. The roll of this situation analysis is to contribute to this. This document lays bare some of the weakness that undermine the current ambitions of both government and developers as they strive to meet their goals.

This Situation analysis has been compiled to help the reader get into the head space of the various people impacted by the roll-out of the wind turbines throughout Ireland, so that the issues identified may be addressed, thereby enabling local support for wind energy projects in Ireland to grow.

There are many opinions and experiences concerning how wind turbines have been rolled out in Ireland (and elsewhere). This situation analysis does not try to give a fully comprehensive picture of all the attitudes and realities. It aims simply to give enough of a flavour of the challenges to understand the need for the approach recommended in the Guide – section 4 of this programme. For those who would want a more conclusive situation analysis, it is recommended that this be created through the process elaborated in the guide under the sponsorship of senior members of the government in partnership with developers and neighbours who live in the impact zones of turbines. It is the opinion of the authors that the problems identified could be rapidly addressed by government and senior members of the industry acknowledging and addressing the identified challenges.

The Guide then outlines a workable solution based on the reality captured in this analysis, the literature review and the experience from difficult projects both in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe.

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[1] https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112185 and summarised at https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RB202105_0.pdf where they found that just 36% of the population of Ireland are willing to accept the development of wind farms within 5 km of their homes. The resulting fear is exacerbated by leaders of the wind industry still making strong statements of how much support they have from local communities: which in turn adds to community members' feeling that they are, yet again, not being listened to, acknowledged and taken into consideration. This is a vicious circle that needs to stop.

2. INTRODUCTION

This analysis has been conducted through 150+ conversations with people living close to existing or proposed wind energy projects, and with people at different ranks within the Wind Energy Industry.

A number of conversations with members of government, local authorities and researchers has also been undertaken.

The content - the challenges, fears and aspirations - of these conversations have been captured through three personas: The Near Neighbour, The Developer, and The Government Official. The voices reflect those in the middle of the bell curve in Figure 1.

When names of organisations, companies or people were mentioned during the research, these have not been included in this report.

This analysis is not about finger pointing, it is about making sure that the conversations needed as elaborated in Figure 2 have relevant information.
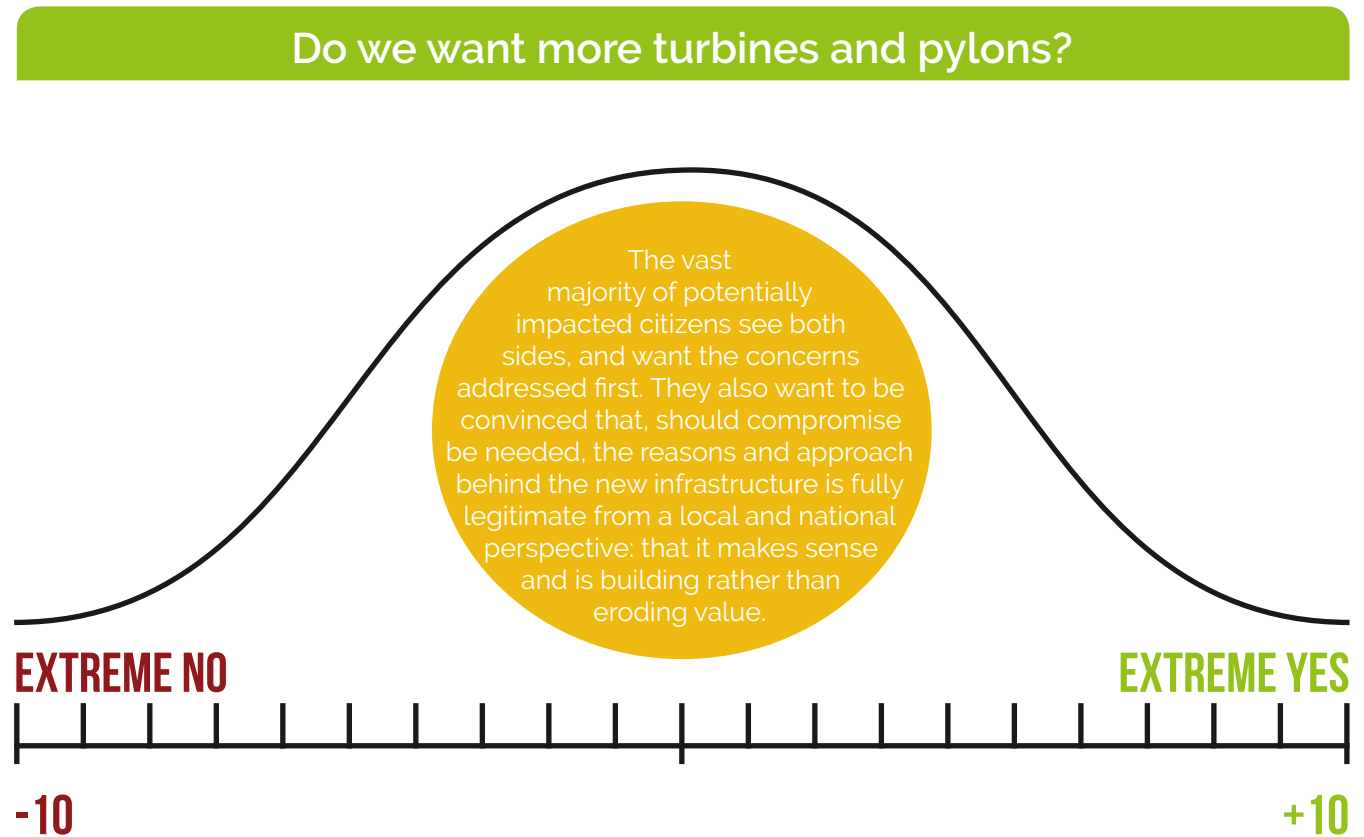
Do we want more turbines and pylons?

The vast majority of potentially impacted citizens see both sides, and want the concerns addressed first. They also want to be convinced that, should compromise be needed, the reasons and approach behind the new infrastructure is fully legitimate from a local and national perspective: that it makes sense and is building rather than eroding value.

EXTREME NO   EXTREME YES

-10   +10

Figure 1: : Citizens are looking for a national leadership that demonstrates a well thought out approach to how the nation meets its energy needs within the context of all the other elements of sustainable development.

As there are many axes to be ground in this area, please note:

▸ For each persona, this document attempts to present the sides of the conversations that bring understanding to the situation in a way that facilitates problems being replaced by their solutions. It has attempted to steer clear of dismissiveness, and has tried to include indications for what needs to be addressed in order to ensure local support for energy projects in the countryside and off the coasts.

▸ The statements made here may not reflect the facts as understood by each reader, but they do reflect strongly held perspectives of people who are faced with wind energy projects. Should anyone reading this want to clarify any of the related facts please send an email to localsupport@astoneco.com.

▸ Similarly, if issues are found missing as you read this document – please send an email and they will be included in a future edition.

WHAT WE DISAGREE ON

POSITIONS

INTERESTS AND VALUES

NEIGHBOURS

WHAT WE AGREE ON

DEVELOPER

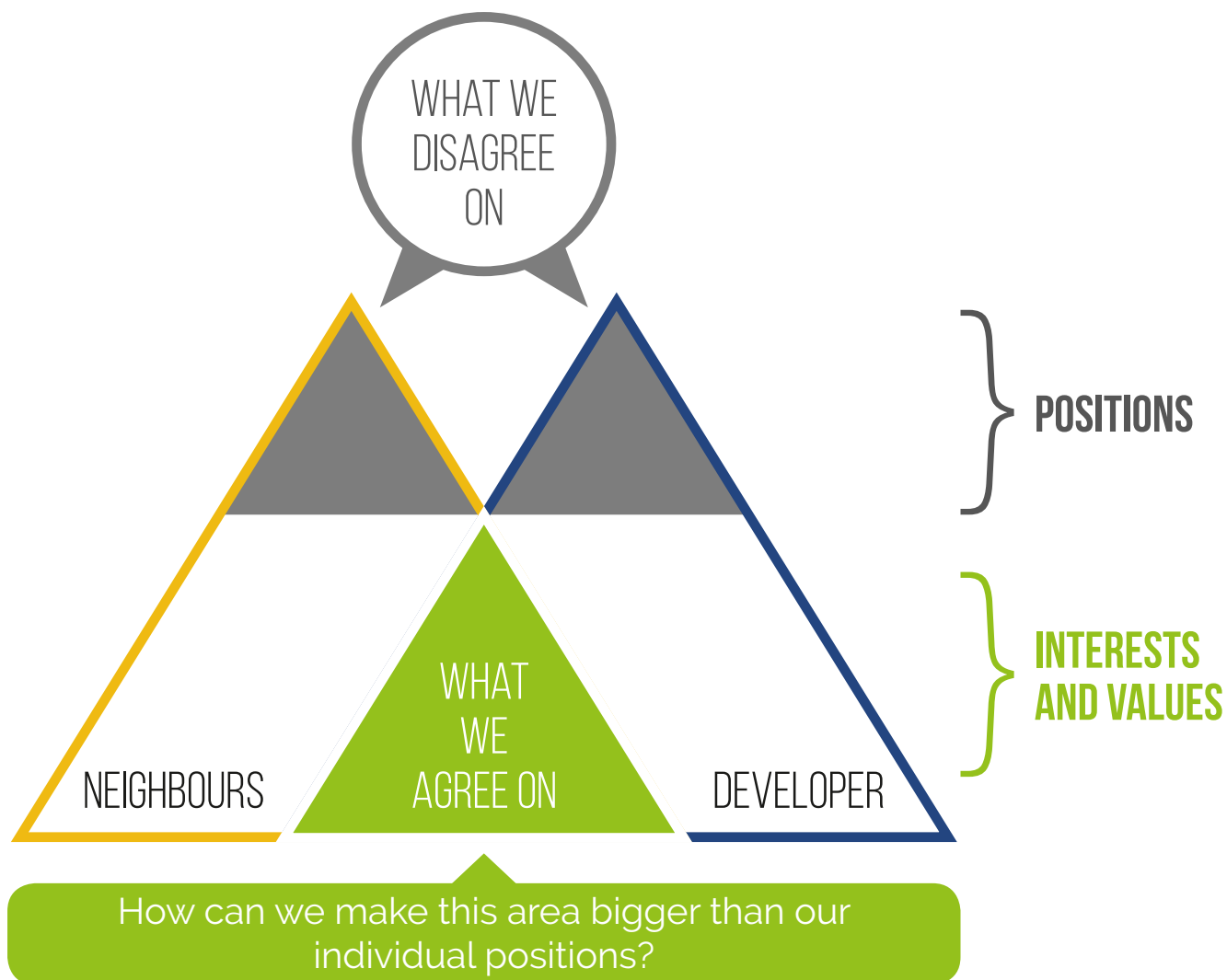How can we make this area bigger than our individual positions?

Figure 2: By building positions through taking other people's decisions, only conflict is seeded. Proactive listening and agreement making is needed to enable sustainable decisions. This takes hard work by people who can bridge between people's realities.

3. MEET THE PERSONAS

NEIGHBOURS

Ensuring the tough questions facing a wind farm development are addressed.

People support the idea of responsibly harnessing the renewable energy that we have in Ireland. This requires that all impacts - positive and negative – are acknowledged and addressed in a fair and meaningful way.

DEVELOPER

Facing up to the community challenges to successfully harness our wind.

We know there is a great wind resource in Ireland - the industry wants to get access to as many suitable sites as possible to deploy the technology to harness it to meet the national energy demand and green energy targets.

GOVERNMENT

Ensuring a legal framework and guidance to protect the social interest.


Many in government are working tirelessly to efficiently and effectively deploy renewable energy technology to help meet our sustainable development goals, which include, but are not limited to, our climate change commitment.

4. MEET THEIR GOALS

NEIGHBOURS GOAL:

To ensure that only wind energy projects supporting a sustainable pathway between community, environment and economic realities are advanced.

ENVIRONMENT

SUSTAINABLE
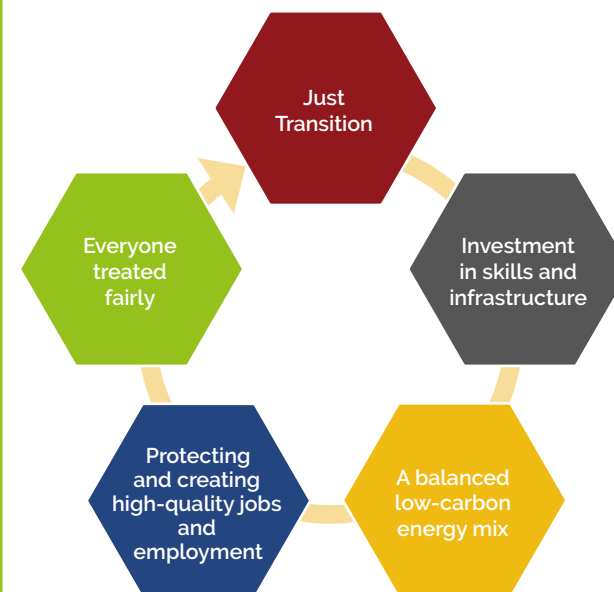DEVELOPMENT

SOCIETY

ECONOMICS
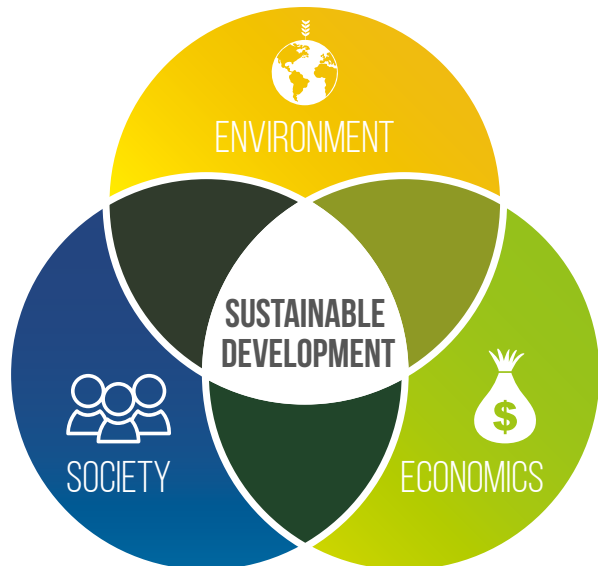
AMBITIOUS DEVELOPER'S GOAL:

To only create projects that are:
▸ Financially sound,
▸ Technically feasible,
▸ Environmentally compatible, and
▸ Socially supported.

Technically feasible

socially supported

smart projects

Financially successful

Environmentally compatible
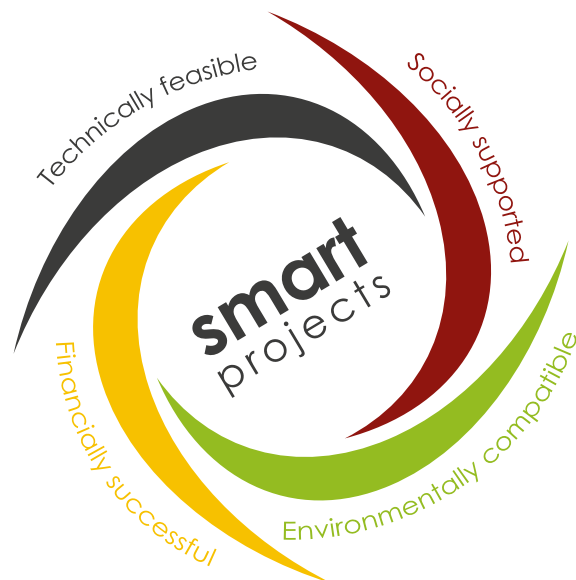
GOVERNMENT & RELEVANT AUTHORITIES GOAL:

To show leadership in providing a fair, sustainable and facilitated path guiding Developers and Communities through a Just Transition from a carbon-based economy to a renewable one.

Just Transition

Investment in skills and infrastructure

Everyone treated fairly

A balanced low-carbon energy mix

Protecting and creating high-quality jobs and employment

5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The way projects are designed need to be specific to each and every community. But there are a few common threads from Chapter 6 below about what needs to be addressed each time. These can be summarised per the three columns below.

Schematically, the essence is captured in Figures 3 & 4.

NEIGHBOURS NEED:

Empowerment = A meaningful seat at the table for decisions that impact neighbours and their community.

Empowerment = Co-authorship of the 'Community Report' required by the draft planning guidelines: to acknowledge and address ALL issues of importance to neighbours.

Fairness = All concerns and negative impacts acknowledged and addressed through a trusted and credible process resulting in partnership. No unilateral decisions.

Sustainable development = Support for, and not undermining of, community cohesion, vibrancy and opportunities. Partner with local synergies.

No means no = Turbines are not placed where it is not appropriate.

The need for opposition to be removed = The above are addressed.

AMBITIOUS DEVELOPER'S NEED:

Local support = Risks & negative impacts mitigated, less opposition, predictable project progress, a clear road to success.

Financial benefits = Time and cost savings and an enhanced brand.

Responsibility = Meet Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) standards & qualify as a sustainability-supporting ESG investment.

Agreement on Standard = A clear indication from government, and an agreement within the industry, on how neighbours' concerns are addressed, and what is expected of each developer to do so.

GOVERNMENT NEED:

Targets = To meet Ireland's decarbonisation commitments.

Targets = To meet Ireland's sustainable development goals.

Responsible Developers = Developers who can listen effectively enough to make the required local agreements to earn local support.

A route to fair standards = A neighbour-developer forum to oversee: (i) Are the current standards fully known and adhered to? (ii) Do they need to be strengthened, and if so, how?

A trusted ombudsman = Ensuring the regulatory environment is respected, factual information is exchanged, and breaches to the agreed standards as addressed.

Intended by the industry and the gov. to mobilise 'community' support,

Significant risk of negative community impacts due to splits created on how the community benefit funds (CBF) are used, and if negative impacts have not been addressed.

The wind project is designed and costed in such a way that near-neighbours do not experience negative effects.

Two prerequisites for the CBF to function as intended:
1. Impacts addressed
2. Committee meets AA1000SES(2015) criteria.

Positive impacts

Life before the wind farm.

Negative impacts

A community member with no negative impacts from a wind farm and who benefits from funds paid to the community.

A community member close enough to experience negative impacts from a wind farm and whose impacts are not acknowledged and addressed by the wind farm developer.

The community benefit fund addresses the loss of the opportunity the community has to develop its own air space to harness winds. This to be done through a transparent partnership with the developer.

Any losses created by the construction of the wind-farm are to be incorporated into the projects financial model.
A project should only be deemed financially viable if it is so without any neighbour taking a negative hit.
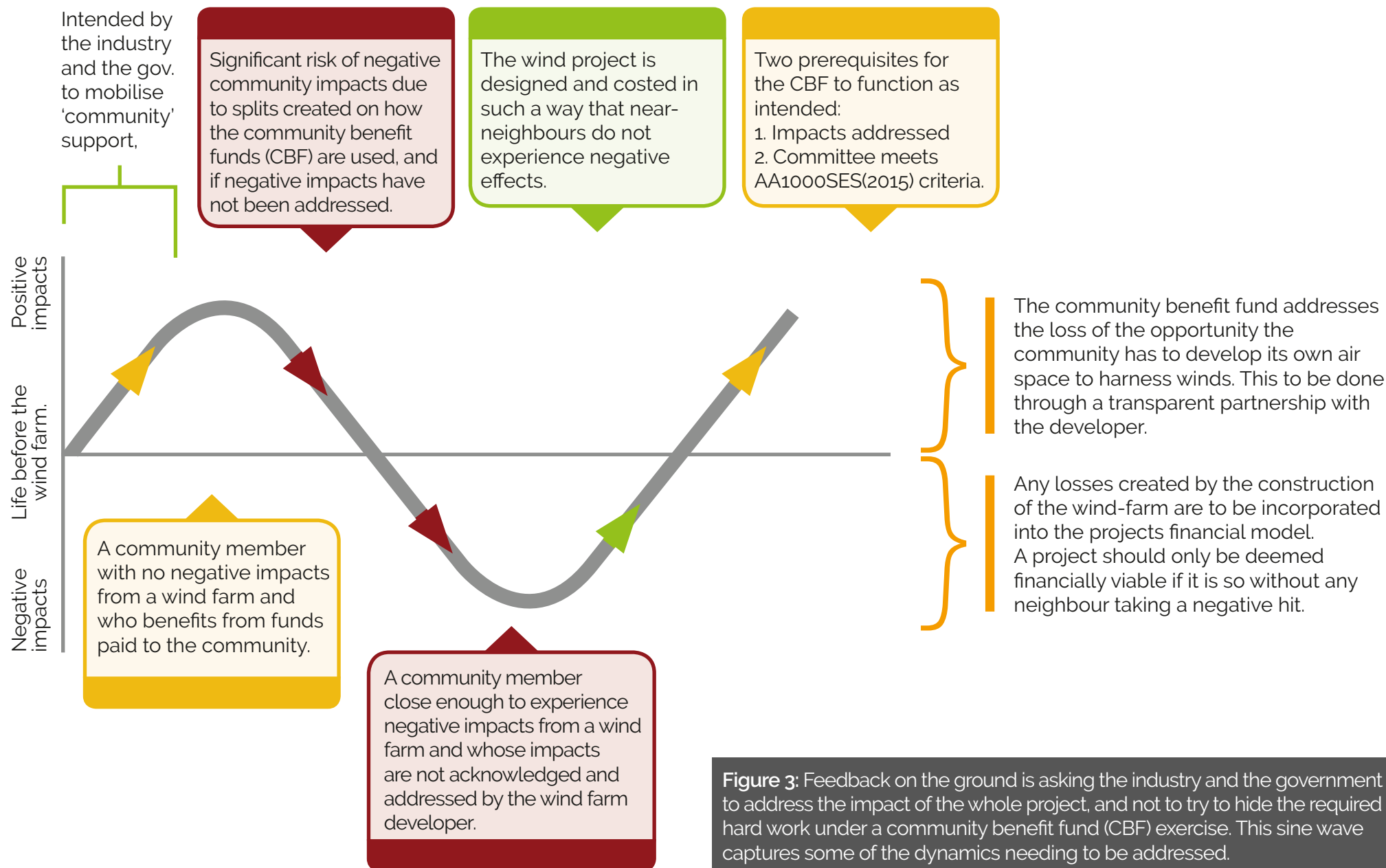
Figure 3: Feedback on the ground is asking the industry and the government to address the impact of the whole project, and not to try to hide the required hard work under a community benefit fund (CBF) exercise. This sine wave captures some of the dynamics needing to be addressed.

1.
Avoid damage

2.
Mitigate impacts

3.
Compensate impacts

4.
Community benefit fund for Sus. Dev. support.

4. Once a wanted project has been identified (with externalities absorbed), ensure the local share of the profits are used wisely.

2 & 3. Working with host communities to ensure the 2016 Government Guidelines (soon to be updated) are applied.

1. Stakeholder engagement to find appropriate sites.

Figure 4: The order and completeness of each impact management step is critical.

6. THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

6.1. Q&AS OUTLINING CHALLENGES, FEARS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR IMPACTED, OR POTENTIALLY IMPACTED NEIGHBOURS QS:

1) Why is there resistance to wind projects?

While many people understand the need for a country powered by renewable energy, they also want their homes to be peaceful places. They also want the local development vision and environment to be respected, and certainly not undermined by poorly placed infrastructure.

Understandably, people are wary of industrial-scale wind turbines close by if it means sacrificing things they value. This even more so if there is a risk that the related decisions will be imposed rather than taken in partnership: there is too high a risk that poor decisions will be made or that important issues will not be appropriately considered. Wind farms are relatively permanent structures, so until a person dies or moves home, it will be there. It also becomes part of the legacy that people pass onto the next generation.

To understand how deep the roots of the resistance can be, spending time within what neighbours call the area of impact helps. Starting in the hundreds of meters from a turbine and going up to the early thousands.

Some specific experiences contributing to this resistance include:

a. Tokenistic engagement by the developer on the issues really important to near-neighbours i.e., neighbours being talked to, rather than listened to which makes them fear powerless and brews resentment.

b. Very little, if any, local partnership in the decisions that impact local neighbours so the current process breeds mistrust rather than a supported joint vision.

c. The withholding of locally relevant information combined with secretive land access deals combine to create divisions in the community. This is the old way. Why has the renewable energy industry not embraced transparency? Are we going backwards with the 'green revolution' rather than forward?

d. Planning permission being obtained via a forceful legal route rather than through a search for acceptable win-win projects: this breeds mistrust and makes enemies.

e. A community benefit approach resulting in split communities that becomes a force for local social degradation rather than a force to support social cohesion.

f. Lack of an independent and credible authority or body to respond to concerns and demands for unbiased information about a development, and to ensure that the resources being harnessed are done

so in a way that supports the sustainable development of all involved. Who can we talk to or do we have to make opposition noises before we are allocated a voice?

2) What concerns do you have as a near-neighbour?

My concerns include:

a. The potential impact of noise and amplitude modulation, among other worries if issues are not addressed effectively, on health and quality of life in and near my home.

b. Potential negative impact on property price, with concerns over both devaluation and a home being more difficult to sell once it has a turbine overshadowing it.

c. These are not your normal little annoyances; yet the negative impacts being experienced by near-neighbours are often not being fairly addressed, and even more so they are often not being acknowledged by the industry or the authorities.

d. The possibility of a degradation of community relationships due to the way many developers focus in on landowners and exclude other people with concerns, until much later in the process, or until they become very vocal, and a community split is started.

e. The lack of meaningful, inclusive opportunities for engagement in wind farm planning and design (other than the right to object to a wind farm). We are being forced into objection as the only line of communication that seems to have any power.

f. The lack of assessment processes to ensure the above concerns are seriously discussed, assessed and appropriately addressed leads to:
    i. difficulty in knowing what we should be worried about or not, and
    ii. the splitting of the community between those who gain (via e.g., land access or community benefit funds), and those who have, or fear to have, negative impacts that are not formally addressed.

g. The lack of open-mindedness from the industry of what mutually beneficial fair-play and win-win assessments and designs might look like.

h. Due to a combination of the above, and sometimes also their individual attitudes, wind farms developers are seen to demonstrate a distinct lack of respect, and empathy towards their near-neighbours.

i. Very concerning is that the Authorities allow this to happen, and don't work to balance the playing field. This contributes to a growing concern about, and opposition to, the wind industry as a viable path to non-fossil fuel energy. There is a real need to ensure that developments near us are designed in partnership so that we can meet our local sustainable development aspirations, while the government and the developers also meet their goals.

j. The draining of a community's social energy, time and finances into fighting for their rights in front of the planning authorities due to the above issues not being effectively addressed. These community resources are needed for all the other issues our communities already face, and wind farm developments, through their current development process, risk degrading local sustainable development: developers and the authorities would gain much more by partnering with the local energy rather than fighting against it or trying to buy it off.

k. Impacts on our sense of place, the landscape I live in – massive spinning turbines dominate the landscape and depending on their siting change some of our valued landscapes permanently. Impacts on landscape also can diminish the tourism potential of a scenic area.

The windfarm can undermine the development of local tourism and so undermine the regeneration of our rural economies.

l. Impacts on biodiversity, especially when turbines are sited close to places with rare bird species such as curlew, hen harriers, etc, or where there are localised ecosystems such as peat bogs, be the sites SAC, SPA, heritage or other.

m. Lack of potential opportunities for local communities with respect to local employment, income generation, ownership and energy security that could be possible from wind energy developments done in partnership in a way that fully respects all the components of local sustainable development. In practice, in order to enable this to happen well, engagement with a community most probably needs to start well before a project design is contemplated. This role may well be a government role rather than a developer's role. Or at least a firmer partnership between the community and the developer from the beginning, with some form of State overview.

3) What changes are needed in the current planning setup?

One word that sums up the required change is 'power'. Or more specifically – its imbalance. The current planning process leaves me, as a near-neighbour, close to powerless with limited opportunities to participate in or influence a development other than by legally objecting to it. Under the current setup, to redress this imbalance of power, I need to have the knowledge, energy, stress resilience, time and finance to mount a legal challenge. To improve the chances of success, a near-neighbour often needs to strengthen this by joining open activism against the injustices in the proposed project.

The reality is that opportunities for meaningful engagement in the design of a proposed development by affected residents are presently too restrictive in Ireland.

4) What concrete changes are needed in how engagement is done?

Neighbours who need to be at the table for decisions that impact them if we are to create projects they can support. By neighbours here, it is meant anyone who can be in any way impacted by a proposed project. Including those who have concerns about what is being proposed. To address the above, we need to have a mindset change in what is meant by engagement.

This may need the development of a locally trusted process to undertake assessment of any proposal. It will need a decision-making process for locally relevant issues to be conducted in partnership between neighbours and the developer. And the purpose – the goal – of this engagement will need to be agreed by both beforehand. It needs to be a community-centric engagement that results in projects as good for the host community as it is for the developer.

A starting point is that if a wind farm is to be built, it needs to improve - rather than erode – the values and quality of life we derive from our landscapes and living spaces in the vicinity of turbines. In some cases, these first need to be identified and understood by all.

The engagement process must also provide our communities with opportunities to strengthen sustainable rural vibrancy & economic growth.

In reality, this is our community, with our sense of place, and it has a long history, and we want it to have an equally long future. For us to welcome a new project, local sustainable development needs to be one of the priorities of any proposed project. To achieved this voice, we often need to be given support to meaningfully engage in the decision-making process to ensure that what is being proposed

adds and partners with the community, rather than distracts or results in missed opportunities.

So that the engagement process works for near-neighbours, our community and the developer: early engagement with near-neighbours is vital to ensure the design of such a process is effective & efficient. Neighbours will be aware that the proposed project affects them both whiles being constructed and once it is up… forever.

Then there is the current planning process. It only allows you to be told what is happening and to object: there is no place for engagement therein – by any modern standard. It is too restrictive to meet the complex challenges of today's communities and to encourage or result in win-win project design. There is no proactive process to build on opportunities.

It results in missed opportunities for synergies in local development, and lots of energy put into legally guided conflicted.

5) Why should near-neighbours & developers work together?

We should work together for at least 3 reasons:

a) to fully understand the risks and opportunities,

b) to ensure that all concerns are acknowledged and genuinely addressed, and

c) to create a project that is acceptable locally thanks to an agreed win-win for all parties to the project: which means as a minimum, it leaves no negative impacts un-mitigated, it builds local social cohesion, and it harnesses local development opportunities, in that order.

The alternative is for both parties to throw their energy into a conflict where only one of us, or maybe none of us, wins. Where we both lose time, energy and resources.

Projects that go ahead without meaningful engagement result in diminished possibilities for communities to build local sustainability, the developers to meet their corporate social responsibility and timelines, and the government to meet its sustainable development goals.

Challenges are easier to fix at the beginning of the process, before relationships get hurt. As with any challenge, identifying and addressing problems and issues early on is much less expensive than if they are left to snowball.

6) How would you like to see the role of project owners & senior managers evolve?

Owners and senior managers are generally very accomplished people. With the level of disquiet and opposition expressed by the many groups of concerned citizens around Ireland, there is a growing need for senior management to demonstrate their commitment to the protection of community and environmental interests: the challenges are more than a narrow energy focus. To earn local support, this needs to be taken as seriously as being financially sound and technically feasible is to project success.

Our landscapes, our bogs, our sleep, our local values, our community cohesion: it is not ok to compromise these to just meet 'narrow' targets like the number of turbine's erected. The environmental oversight failures at the likes of the Meenbogs and Derrybriens are only the tip of the iceberg. Community fabric is equally as important to local sustainable development and community wellbeing.

Owners and senior managers need to use their expertise to give robust oversight to meaningful assessments & community partnerships that deliver on what all players need. Indeed, judging by the amount of projects failing to form meaningful partnerships with their host community, and then experiencing cost and time overruns due to lack of local support, from a pure business perspective it would seem that project Boards need to have earning local support much higher up on their priority list than the results on the ground currently suggest it is. It is important to them; it is doubly as important to those whose homes and communities they impact.

Two concerns often heard from near-neighbours living close by turbines are:

(i) "Why are the developers not putting senior project designers instead of messengers with no meaningful decision-making abilities as interface between us and the project owners so that we could work together to create mutually acceptable projects?" and

(ii) "Why do the messengers we get so often keep telling us everything is fine, and talk about 'benefits' rather than take the local concerns seriously and address them?"

The above is crucial for near neighbours, as a planned industrial development close by is almost always an unwelcome burden on people who have already all the stress and work their own lives demand. On the developer's side, there are paid professionals, doing their jobs. Under the current set up, communities are only left with 'enthusiasts' to defend them. And they have the wealth and health inherent in their homes to lose. They need to know they are being treated fairly. Addressing this imbalance would be very helpful to all involved, and would make for more meaningful engagement.

Senior people need to focus on getting to know the concerns of near-neighbours and their community first, early on, and then agree the basic principles and ground rules to enable a project to be designed in partnership. Community benefit funds and other 'peace offerings' cannot replace this need.

7) Do engagement standards & guidelines help?

Standards and guidelines, by definition, lack completeness; not only from the moment they are printed they are based on past experiences, this experience is normally from a different community, a different set of challenges. However, they could present a useful basis to be adapted and built on locally. To be helpful, they need to be put on the table and incorporated into the co-creation of an engagement process that builds its credibility and trustworthiness through acknowledging concerns followed by agreement making between neighbours, the developers, and other interested parties in a way that

acceptable shared goals are reached and delivered on.

For this to happen, these, and the engagement process they inform, need to be discussed, negotiated and agreed BEFORE the engagement starts and the project is designed. A key issue to agree is how will assessments be undertaken and decisions that impact the different parties be taken.
With the extra pressures of Auctions and inter-developer competition, this will need:
a) clarity from the government on what standard is expected from the developers and
b) more understanding within developers about what a community

partnership that actual adds value to their projects looks like. Great partnerships remove costs, they do not add costs. Poor engagement adds costs.

This can be initiated by a genuine three-way conversation, upon a foundation of proactive listening between the host community, the developer and the relevant authorities. Strengthening the current guidelines to include this by agreeing what works and what needs

improving will be a strong trust-building step. And we are not just talking about wind energy projects here, we are talking about any project that has an impact on the host community. We look to our government to set the conditions to mandate and facilitate such dialogue. So that sustainable local agreements leading to projects that support all aspects of local sustainable development are delivered on.

8) How can neighbours be better involved in the planning approval process?

Ireland is blessed with a wonderful nature, a persistent wind and a warm community fabric. This is complemented by a wonderful, internationally famous, landscape. Currently, many neighbours feel that the wind industry, through their actions and inactions, inherently disrespects this national heritage. As communities work to support the cohesion, development and protection of the landscape, we must stop making the own goal that we as a nation are now committing. The current planning process is allowing wind projects to be designed solely by engineers and business people in their offices, rather than in partnership with the communities that host them. Strategically, this weakness needs to be rapidly and systematically addressed. The designs need to create well balanced wins for all related

social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects.

To guide this, we also need to know how many turbines do we need sites for. As a community member, we have no access to a strategic plan that has computed where the windfarms are to be built, nor to how many need to be built. Is there a limit? What / who is driving this number? We understand from press articles that we aim for 70% renewable energy and that the projects in development or being planned have achieved that. Have they? Who do we ask? And why 70% when in parallel to placing massive wind turbines beside homes we have also increased our nation's demand for more energy? Or have we? Is there an open community-empowering forum to help those of us who give a damn about our community and country to be at the decision-making table? It seems we have the highest concentration of onshore windfarms in the world (per capita? per land mass?). Does the government have a target when we have enough onshore wind considering we are going offshore too, and that offshore can host larger higher capacity turbines? And is offshore going to follow the same roll-out as onshore: to get turbines up

wherever the industry can force such decisions through the courts? Has the value of our coastline as it has been given by nature been taken into account? What setback from the coast will be sought? Based on what data, or what assessment? And when the projects are deemed fitting in a certain context, can these projects become local sustainable development supporting projects rather than simply industrial wind farms imposed on the landscape?

As we create a new Ireland with our renewable energies tapped, are we being careful enough not to create a poorer Ireland in quality and cohesion for our nature and communities? Are we ensuring that the great opportunity to use the energy revolution to support community vibrancy is optimised and not bypassed through excessive one-dimensional planning?

People from communities all over Ireland look to governments to enforce a developer - neighbour engagement and agreement making framework to ensure that all voices are heard and addressed before projects are designed. To set the stage to create win-win outcomes where i) potential losses are identified and addressed,

and ii) the wind is used to support our local sustainable development.

Hopefully the upcoming 'Community Report' might help to address this[2]. Making it normal business practice for all potentially impacted people to have their concerns genuinely aired, listened to and recorded in the report, together with what related agreements, or agreements to disagree, were arrived at should be mandatory before a project is formally designed. The report also needs to identify opportunities and synergies between neighbours and developers so that these can be incorporated into project design. Should the host community feel that, despite the best intensions and good quality dialogue, the site is not suitable for wind turbines, this also needs to be recorded and their argumentations noted. The Community Report that goes to the Planning Authorities needs to be signed off my all neighbours within the Impact Zone; if anyone does not want to sign something off then the reason for this also needs to be recorded. Then, the challenge still remains of how the report used and who judges if it is complete enough to enable a submission to planning of not? We need to be careful about endorsing the Community Report format until

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[2] Questions around this included 'what elements of the community report will make a difference? If the majority of people are still objecting to the windfarm, will that make any material difference? Will those designing the wind project then need to listen? Will the view point of each potentially impacted person need to be reported upon and addressed? A potential solution to this is presented in Chapters 3 & 8 and Appendix 2 of the Guide.

we see how it is used. Clearly in the format proposed in the draft guidelines as interpreted by the couple of developers who tried to follow it in 2020, the Community Report is little more than pushing community funds and writing about what efforts the developer made to engage. They did not address the broad range of issues highlighted here. A big change is still needed for this idea to bear the fruit the government is hoping it might bear.

The above comments were driven by the desire from near-neighbours that all potentially impacted stakeholders be given the opportunity for open transparent dialogue in good faith to define constraints a project would need to respect. The aim is to see what a project would look like when designed in a way that 'no-one is left worse off', and that the community and the developer (and the nation) meet their social, environmental, financial and sustainability goals through how the project is designed and implemented.

9) What message do you have for those undertaking wind farm developments?

People and communities, with their network of relationships, live in the homes that are maybe but house numbers on maps to you. How you engage and build relationships with these

people, how the potential and real impacts are addressed, and how proposed projects contribute towards, or take away from the local community, all impacts the quality of life in these homes and within these communities.

How you choose to behave will impact on the relationships not only between those involved in the project and the near neighbours, but also between the near-neighbours and their surrounding community. It will either distract from or support the community fabric needed for local sustainable development, community cohesion and vibrancy.

Through not fully understanding and addressing these issues well the developer themselves fuel local opposition to wind energy projects.

No one says this is easy. It is not simply about employing new people or building bigger community benefit funds. You know that having a person who studied business on your staff is sometimes useful, but this does not guarantee you a successful business. Likewise, even progressive developers who employ a person who did a degree in community development, or who worked for a community development organisation, and who feel that this one act will make them understand all communities, are only at the beginning of the journey. It is much

deeper than this. Everyone in an organisation who takes decisions that in any way impact a community needs to understand this.

It is also not simply about spending money. One of the larger wind farm developers advertise their community benefit funds with 'the intention of helping the communities neighbouring their wind farms to become more sustainable'. This is a nice intention. But many people who experience what it is like to deal with them as a near-neighbour would ask them to first run their core business and develop their projects in a way that enables 'communities neighbouring their wind farms to become more sustainable'. The budget and effort that goes into the actual wind energy harnessing project will always be orders of magnitude larger than community benefit funds - real progress will be made by managing this on a much more partnership basis, in a way that address all the above concerns, rather than trying to use community benefit funds to, so to speak, buy love, and cover up the damage being done by a one-dimensional industry.

6.2. Q&AS OUTLINING CHALLENGES, FEARS AND ASPIRATIONS ON THE DEVELOPERS' SIDE:

1) To be clear – how do you define Local Support

Local Support is what it says on the tin: either we have designed a project in a way that we have local people's permission for it or we haven't. When we have local support, people want us in their community.

Local Support is a measure of the level to which we protect local community interest.

To put this in pure business speak, if Local Support were a currency, it would measure how well we deliver on local healthy relationships leading to local sustainable development.

2) Why has gaining local support for your projects become such a key business risk?

Local community opposition, and the related planning and political difficulties, are becoming a higher and higher risk factor threatening the timeframes and success of wind projects in Ireland. When we started 20 years ago, we were seen as green energy heroes 'saving the planet', now we are seen as industrial invaders undermining local social cohesion and eroding local value. We maybe took the good will of the communities that host us too much for granted, or as a commodity that could be bought via community benefit funds.

While we have become more and more professional in managing the financial, technical and environmental risks of wind projects, we have not yet successfully addressed and resourced the earning of broad support from all concerned in our local communities. By becoming recognised as a key business risk, we can now fully address this.

Ultimately, if we do the right thing by the community, we will get a smoother ride to planning.

And if we become favoured as fair partners by communities, we would be welcomed at more sites.

The need for a healthy bank account in this currency for any project development is growing fast, as there is a growing demand that wind projects be done in a way that is fully supportive of the sustainable development fabric of the communities that host them. Given the stresses that rural and coastal communities are already under, it is important that wind projects are not allowed to tip them in the wrong direction.

This is essential if the industry wishes to have a healthy social license to operate. Now, recognised as a key business risk, earning local support can get the attention it requires.

3) What are the financial rewards for a project that earns Local Support?

It has become clearer that the extent of local support a developer earns for a proposed project results in time and cost savings. Financial rewards include:
▸ a clearer path to planning approval and project rewards
▸ an alternative to the current reliance on the option to push a unilateral developer-designed project to permits through the courts.
▸ higher investor confidence due to reduced social and political risk and an insurance policy to protect investments in other aspects of the project – thereby easier access to finance.
▸ much less attrition with (and between) neighbours and less stress on our team

resulting in better team moral, retention and performance,

▸ the avoidance of excessive demand for compensation for the negative impacts,

▸ an enhanced brand with associated trust for future developments that delivers a further tangible return on investment for community related work,

▸ through earning the Local Support currency, we enable investments from ESG funds (ESG = Environmental, Social and Governance, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/ environmental-social-and-governance-esg-criteria.asp).

4) How important is gaining Local Support to your corporate purpose & strategy?

Some people still argue that, seeing as many projects have got away without gaining widespread local support, it is not important to our core corporate purpose & strategy.

When looked at through the lens of all local parties, however, our job is to harness the wind energy of Ireland in a way that is good for developers, good for Ireland and good for our near-neighbours and the community they live in. By strategically integrating this into our core business, we place earning local support on a par with the other key components of project

development (financial, technical, planning and environment). This way we meet the expectations of the Just Energy Transition.

To be relevant in an increasing interconnected and complex world, we need to give local communities a concrete reason to support us. Just like we give concrete reasons to our shareholders. A requirement for a positive outcome needs to be the new normal.

5) What is the Company's Board's role in helping guide the company to its local consent?

There are many cases where our Boards do not ask difficult questions regarding how we are doing on earning local support. This probably needs to change.

If the teams on the ground had a clear message that our Boards' will exercise the same oversight to our earning of local support as it does to the other key risks that the Board requires to be managed, then this would go a long way in changing how we engage with our communities. If local support, or the lack of it, is really one of our core project failure risks then this becomes a no-brainer. On top of this, we get the upsides in value creation as outlined in 3) above.

The Board, therefore, needs to be involved in incorporating earning local support into corporate strategy through shaping the mindset of, and setting incentives for, and oversight of, the management of these risks. They need to facilitate this being done in partnership with near-neighbours and other potentially impacted people.

Our Board also needs to be a proactive ambassador for engaging with near neighbours and our communities so that we design projects that build the industry's reputation. There is a collective responsibility by our Board to contribute to a good governance for wind energy project design. As with other extractive industries, the Board needs to ensure that we: "Proactively engage key stakeholders on sustainable development challenges and opportunities in an open and transparent manner, effectively report and independently verify progress and performance." (www.icmm.com, 2020).

As more and more Boards in the wind industry understand the link between the non-addressed impacts within the Developer – Near-Neighbour impact zone (see Figure 5 below for a schematic showing the noise component of this impact zone), and opposition, activism and political hesitance linked to a project persists, they want the problems fixed

before they escalate. The public at large are also more and more demanding that concerns regarding near neighbours are addressed. This issue will become more acute as the wind energy industry expands if it is not resolved. Problems are easier to fix at the beginning of the process, before feelings get hurt. And addressing problems and issues early on is much less expensive than if they are left to snowball.

6) How do you present this to your shareholders and key stakeholders?

Anyone who is investing money (or other capitals – e.g., politician's investing political capital) into the roll-out of more and bigger turbines would like all potentially fatal project risks to be mitigated. Not having sufficient local support is proving to be one of these fatal risks. Senior investors and politicians understand this and will welcome action.

This also enables a developer to expand market share and access to financing through ESG credentials.

Many industry players, however, are not yet convinced. They still believe that following the letter rather than the spirit of the law as defined by the planning process is sufficient to address

these project risks. So, to a large extent, there is a lot of sharing of experience, understanding and learning required within the industry to ensure the earning of local support receives the strategic attention it receives elsewhere.

Further, in Ireland we don't have the well organised local community structures like in Denmark or Scotland. So many industry players find they have only a weak partner to deal with when they import their community relations strategy from overseas. Their strategy therefore under performs.

In order to address this challenge effectively, ensuring there is a process in place to co-design projects that earn genuine local support makes sense to an investor. Thus, presenting this as core business undertaken by senior management is important in our communication with key shareholders and stakeholders.

7) What expertise is required to earn sufficient local support and what changes are needed in our current project development setup?

Building our local support requires that a project's team has attitude and aptitude to fully understand the viewpoints of other stakeholders - especially potential neighbours - of a proposed project. Historically, many of our wind farm developers

were never equipped to do this. It was simply not part of the required job description.

A project manager sometimes goes to a door of a potential near neighbour with a heavy heart. They know that there are negative impacts near a wind turbine that they have not a clear strategy to assess, clearly mitigate and offer compensation for any residual impacts (should there be a place for a wind farm in the local context in the first place). They also know that this is something that has not been clearly acknowledged and discussed with their boss. This may be because their boss is concerned with i) if we address this subject, where would that all end up? ii) what would the overall costs be? iii) would we end up being sued for previous projects? iv) and would we be seen by others in the industry as being the ones who opened the floodgates?

There is currently no agreed model. Addressing this is part of the required capacity building for the renewable energy industry. The talk among community members of doing this within the larger context of how wind energy projects can support local sustainable development may be the way to go. To address this may take leadership from government or from our industry bodies.

This will take a skill set that bridges the business, technical and permitting realities of

developers and the co-design requirements needed to support local sustainable development. We need to articulate the challenges from everyone's perspective so that this larger picture can be built.

Ultimately, this means building project teams that understand how to build partnerships with our near-neighbours and their community.

Learning should not be confined to individual developers. More emphasis needs to be given to collective learning (by the industry) and innovation. There is a role for individual and collective learning by the industry as a whole, but also for statutory agencies and civil society. That is, if we really want to use the harnessing of our wind energy to not only meet carbon targets, but also support the developers' and host communities' sustainable development, and that of the nation as a whole.

8) Do the current standards and guidelines enable the developers to reach a minimum standard of local sustainable development support?

Good work in this area has been undertaken; but needs strengthening. The government's 2016 code of practice states: "Project promoters should clearly identify and consult

with local communities on these impacts and set out the reasonable measures and steps they will take to ameliorate, mitigate or compensate for these impacts." Yet the word 'compensate' is a dirty word in our industry and we are encouraged not to use it but instead to focus on benefits. This has become an own goal and will benefit from being urgently addressed if we want to stop building opposition to our activities. It may be that developers would rise to this challenge if each developer was obliged to do so, and should the government, developers and near-neighbours agree what that one simple line in the 2016 Government Guidelines means; and then apply it.

Ultimately, a project's engagement process needs to be credible and trustworthy enough for near neighbours, their community and developers to have faith that it will lead them to an acceptable common goal and results through the realisation of agreements that are easily understood and then delivered on.

Guidance such as the international stakeholder engagement standard AA1000SES(2015) can be used – in essence this says 1) be clear of the purpose for the engagement, 2) undertake a systematic approach to ensure all issues (the

principle of Materiality) important to anyone concerned (the principle of Inclusiveness) are acknowledged and addressed (the principle of Responsiveness). Note 'addressed' does not mean we need to do what we are told: it just means that as inclusive an agreement as possible is obtained as to how the issue is to be dealt with.

Guidance such as the OECD's Meaningful Engagement Due Diligence Guide for the Extractive Industries offers useful experience also, albeit it needs to be adapted from the extractives to the wind harnessing industries.

In practice, the effective standards and guidelines are those negotiated between the parties before a project conceptual design is undertaken.

More guidance and consensus as to what this would look like is needed between all stakeholders. Experience exists from the extractive and consumable goods industries and more recently, pilot projects testing this approach in Ireland for wind energy and the national grid. Successful pilots need to be highlighted, shared and critically discussed. The industry is full of smart people and can learn how better to develop and partner the host community, once they put their mind to it.

9) From all your experience with wind projects in Ireland, where are we as developers most needing to improve?

There are a number of areas where we can up our game. One of them is obvious when meeting people within earshot of a turbine. There is often a level of anger and frustration that neither the developer nor the authorities were acknowledging problems such as noise and property price impact, never mind addressing them. This was often magnified by the developer seeming to consistently put their effort into downplaying the problem. There was anger that a constructive approach was not adapted to fully understand the magnitude of the problems, and to mitigate them in a way that no one person has to take a negative hit to the wealth inherent in their home, or to their quality of life.

Some neighbours did say that developers acknowledged somewhat the issues privately but then went on to say that there was not money in the projects to address these issues. Given the level of profits reported from wind farm projects when they are sold on, this aggravated the feeling of being picked on and bullied for the sake of a developer earning more money from a wind turbine.

On a reassuring note, there are many individual project managers and team members working with near neighbours in a way that shows that a constructive approach is both possible and affordable. Many know we can and need to improve, and some are trying to.

Given the urgency in the national plans for the role out of renewables, we just all need to do it as a matter of course.

10) From what you have seen, how big is the noise problem?

It is complex. It depends on distance, topography, wind direction (if a home is downwind or not), and atmospheric pressure among other things. You can go to a site where one day you can hear nearly nothing, only to come back on another day and the noise is very present. There are also situations where the noise is worse at 800 metres from a turbine than 600 metres. And then there the court cases where developers have had to settle noise complaints with considerable sums of money. It is obviously not simple and definitely demands more transparency than many home owners receive.

Not addressing it fairly and systematically is a problem for our credibility, and the current modus operandi is probably one of the root causes that creates opposition to our industry.

It is not sure that governmental regulation can solve this on its own. Standards or regulations may not allow for the negotiation of acceptable outcomes between parties as cases differ significantly between each other. What we do know is that you cannot address complex problems such as noise and set back distances, let alone negotiate win-win outcomes, if you do not involve the communities, and especially the near-neighbours, before the conceptual designs are done. You then use detailed design to finetune how the win-win outcomes are delivered.

11) If you could introduce a fundamental change that would significantly help earn local support, what would you focus on?

Firstly, this is not about introducing something that has been proven to work elsewhere. We can certainly learn from what people do with wind farms in other countries, and from other industries. But the socio-economic realities of our communities are unique. The solutions need to be co-designed with them.
Currently, for a number of reasons, members of the developers' teams are as afraid of the community interactions as communities are afraid of wind farms. This often leads to a certain aloofness from the developers, which in turn gives the impression that we don't really care about the concerns people have. The same may be correct about the Authorities.

Introducing a real dose of humanisation back into the process would go a long way.

Setting up structures early on in the process where we can hear more clearly what the concerns are would certainly add value to our decision-making process. It would also give us a more creative framework for our project design briefs.

Building more robust local partnerships, therefore, before a project is put on the design table would be high up there in the changes required. But who does this? The developer? The government? The local authorities? Community groups? All or part of the above in partnership?

This would also help us address the fact that, institutionally, wind farms in Ireland are owned, designed and governed by the private sector and by semi-state bodies, not by communities. This leaves a governance vacuum in the decision making between the developer and local community development. Reaching out to examples in places like Denmark don't really help either – there has been an energy generation culture in Danish countryside for well over 150years. In Ireland, there has been no such culture.

There are substantial issues linked to how the public perceive our decision-making process coming down the line over the next year or two that we need to address sooner rather than later. The maturing of the Corporate Social Responsibility management models will also push this agenda.

Historically we have not undertaken project designs with the host communities at the design table, nor developed the skills to do this. Yet as private corporate entities we will get much closer to earning local support if we learn to do this effectively. This may be the biggest fundamental change needed. The Guide that this research programme will be developing will need to address this. This is not something that can just be imported from elsewhere due to the point about energy culture above, and due to a lack of local community structures that represent all local citizens. It will need to be a tailor-made solution for us in Ireland, though, is not the only country in the world with this problem. Many countries where the extractive industries operate have equally and often poorer local community structures, They know that being a partner to address this is part of doing business..

6.3. Q&AS OUTLINING CHALLENGES, FEARS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND RELEVANT AUTHORITIES:

1) Why is the Irish government pushing an agenda that is encouraging the deployment of wind turbines throughout Ireland?

The government has committed internationally to an ambitious decarbonisation programme. The government believes that wind energy is currently the most competitive modern renewable energy source in Ireland capable of providing green energy at low cost, whilst also delivering on energy security, employment and its low carbon energy targets. The government believes that harnessing it is crucial to our energy independence and the low carbon transition.

However, the government also accepts that wind energy project decisions and siting must be in the social interest and meet both efficiency-cost-benefit and sustainability criteria, and this includes the impact on communities. Policy, regulation and planning must align the social and private interests, and be used to restrain developments with excessive social costs.

The government is also cognisant that alternatives to wind farms need to be constantly kept in mind so that alternatives exist for projects that simply are not the best local option.

2) If you had to summarise the recent Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020, what would you say?

It is all about pursuing a 'climate neutral' economy by 2050, while maximising, as far as practicable, the net benefits to society, promoting sustainable development and building a low carbon energy infrastructure representing a proper legacy for future generations.

It is about energy generation, yes, but also energy efficiency.

3) What does the bill intend to deliver?

To quote from a government's press release, 2020: "The Climate Action Bill provides a clear and important signal to the economy, to businesses, farmers and to our communities that climate action will drive investment, to allow us reach our climate targets, stimulate job creation and provide a safer and healthier environment for all of society."

All this while enhancing energy security and cooperating for a brighter future. It begs the question of whether it will require more onshore wind or will offshore, solar and other measures meet the requirements? There is no doubt that communities need further clarity around this, so they in turn can prepare for what may be coming.

It must be stressed, however, that this bill does in no way weaken other bills that are there to support local sustainable development, other enterprises, community cohesion and a healthier environment.

4) Is Local Consent one of the main challenges to reaching Renewable Energy (RE) targets?

Yes, local consent - from near neighbours and their community - is often a major obstacle faced as we try to meet our RE targets. Concerned communities and stakeholders have the potential to cause lengthy delays to developments throughout the planning process leading to cost over runs for developers and

the state. The root causes of this need to be addressed as one of the core aspects of project development.

5) Are near-neighbours justified in their concerns?

There are cases of near neighbours being treated unfairly by wind farm projects. There are more cases of people who are left with their concerns and the project is forced to permits without interacting with them. Both of these realities would suggest that the above question is dismissed too easily. I am not on the ground very often and so I, for one, can certainly not answer it.

Good practice would indicate that the question needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis as the issues needing to be addressed and balanced change from site to site. To correctly answer this question, developers and authorities alike need to significantly improve our local listening before projects are conceived. With so many new projects in the pipeline, it is probable that the need to listen more closely, and address the issues in time, is rapidly increasing as we increase pressure on the Renewable Energy (RE) roll-out. Through assuming that people are justified in their concerns the chances are that resolutions will happen quicker and so avoid lengthy delays will be avoided and improved projects will be rolled out.

6) What can the government do to ease community and other stakeholder concerns to ensure sustainable developments and reduce potential delays to the planning process?

Steps to be taken include:
▶ Move away from using sleek messaging like 70 by 30 PR speak towards cultivating critical thinking around such goals, resulting in more open dialogue to generate a shared understanding around the need for sustainably reaching our RE targets; and what they should be.
▶ Include the option of a CO_2 reduction target for each community rather than a target about how many turbines need to go up. Consider internal carbon trading. Clarify the correct balance between wind and other forms of renewable energy technologies in meeting our targets.
▶ When turbines are considered to be the optimum local solution, acknowledge concerns, impacts (positive and negative) and fears associated with wind energy developments and internalise these costs.
▶ Address concerns in a way that builds respectful relationships and trust.

▸ Ensure the environmental impact assessments of projects are carried out by independent assessors, with the meaningful oversight and involvement of those potentially impacted.

▸ Urgently undertake public consultation on the proposed new guidelines for wind farms, and get the dated 2006 replaced with 2021 guidelines.

▸ Urgently advance the discussions about the need to deploy an independent ombudsman to ensure community concerns regarding wind farm developments are dealt with before they fester.

7) We assume if a wind farm developer has earned local consent then all social costs must have been averted, but are they?

It is our intention that the Community Report required by the updated wind energy guidelines thoroughly document the full impact of proposed projects, and how the developer – community dialogue deals with these. Some further guidelines to ensure the Community Report addresses all the locally material issues in an inclusive manner will be most probably needed.

It is true that, once the community report captures all locally prioritised issues, other values potentially lower down the local priority

levels associated with cultural landscape assets and biodiversity might not have been accounted for. It is important to robustly use the legally required project assessment processes to address all potential impacts locally, as well as nationally. And it is important to verify that these processes address all material issues.

In addition to the Report, we will update the 2016 Code of Practice in 2021, and place it on a statutory footing. This updated code will embrace many significant improvements and requirements that will facilitate more meaningful engagement resulting in addressing more of the issues at host community level.

8) What is the main link between what government does and earning local support?

The government sets the required policy and framework.

Through earning local support, it is anticipated that proposed projects have convinced local communities that the project has leveraged the opportunities to enhance local sustainable development.

The government wants to increase Ireland's wind energy capacity as one of the solutions to meeting our climate commitments whilst

achieving sustainable growth for the energy sector. Through doing this, we also replace imported fossil fuels with indigenous renewable supplies.

With the right policies and guidelines, the government aims to address community concerns and strengthen rural development, sustainability and employment and energy security whilst progressing the low carbon transition. The wind energy governance model must ensure developments are designed in such a way that both of these goals –climate targets and sustainability are met.

9) Where would you be most concerned regarding where we are with the current government legal framework?

Current tools and methods by statutory authorities to avoid excessive social costs may not fully protect the social interest. Despite it being very difficult for regulations to achieve this 100% at the best of times, there has been long delays in making the progress we are hoping for.

Both feedback from neighbours to wind turbines and research on procedural and distributional justice in Ireland (in NUIG among other places) reveals gaps in current statutory legislation regarding community impacts,

benefits and engagement. There are some voices that industry should be allowed to self-regulate on a lot of the issues linked to communities. Yet, given the level of concerns heard across the country, statutory authorities assume that current practices by developers are satisfactory.

The efficacy of forthcoming wind farm guidelines and Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) initiatives that speak to concerns regarding externalities, community benefit arrangements and distributional justice procedures must still be demonstrated and be seen to be publicly accountable and legitimate. Demand for a meaningful place at the decision tables for issues of importance to communities needs to be operationalised through carefully considered instruments. We need to work with industry and neighbours to develop processes for this. These need to be closely monitored and improved as experience builds.

Further, we need to decide how to address the need to improve governance for wind energy projects through either the 'trusted intermediatory' or 'ombudsman' idea - or a combination of these - that can enforce a route to broad community support captured through agreements with neighbours and the host community about what the projects can and

cannot do. Whether this be via a community representative body, a knowledge broker, a trusted facilitator and/or participatory working groups to provide for meaningful dialogue and synergetic designs between developers and affected local communities. To ensure the role of 'trusted intermediatory' delivers, then the question is if this role should have its own code of conduct that it is accountable to and to what extent its independence would need to be strengthened by being funded by the State.

Other areas where there is room for more regulatory clarity include:
▶ What would a scoring system look like to track and cost social and environmental impacts, and to measure the effectiveness of the measures used to avoid, mitigate, or compensate for any residual costs.
▶ What mechanism can be put in place to ensure that property prices are not adversely impacted by developments? Is there a consensus that this needs to be addressed and for us to aim to have a resolution in place in the shortest possible timeframe? (There are case studies we can learn from from the continent - this would need a bit of government sponsored focus.)
▶ What mechanism can ensure that community benefit and ownership funds are not used to mask underlying externalities that should first

be addressed, especially in the "near neighbour impact zone"? (see Figure 5 below for a schematic showing the noise impact Zone). The RESS has started to look at this, and we need to figure out how this can be best reflected in our legislation.
▶ What mechanism can we use to ensure community benefit schemes or share options are used to strengthen local sustainable development rather than just cover up non-addressed externalities?
▶ Do we need statutory authorities to designate an independent ombudsmen/state agency that can provide a community – environmental – economic (sustainable community development) umbrella as a point of contact and coordination affected residents, ambitious developers and community representation to improved interaction and access to expertise from the multiple professionals needed to incorporate a wind farm development into a larger community and local development project?
▶ Ultimately, what do we need to do more than we are already doing to incentivise wind farm governance and design that builds local sustainable development and public good provision, and that avoids public-bads which act as obstacles for future wind farm developers and other entrants who can help meet the country's climate and sustainable development commitments?
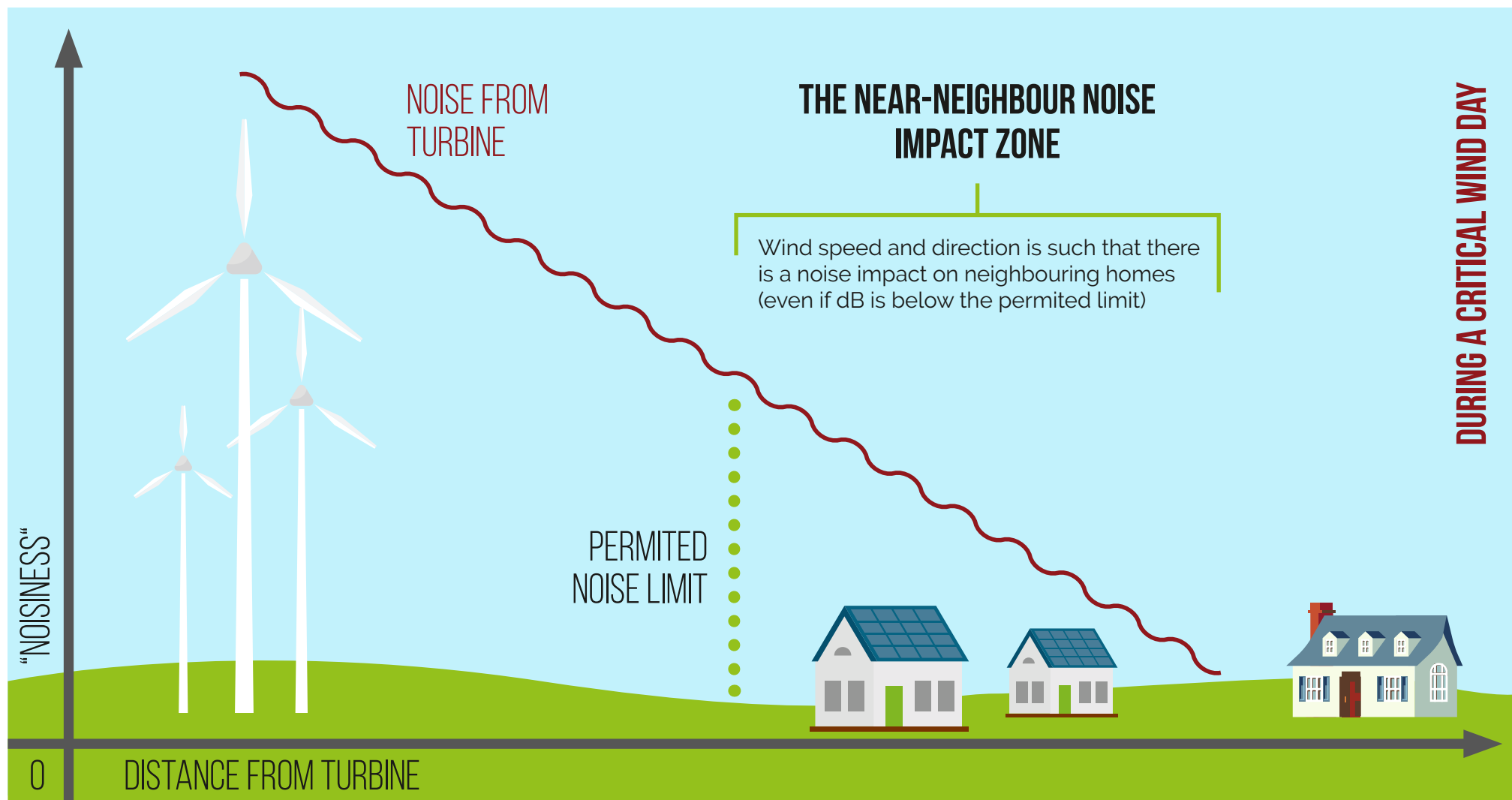
"NOISINESS"

NOISE FROM TURBINE

THE NEAR-NEIGHBOUR NOISE IMPACT ZONE

Wind speed and direction is such that there is a noise impact on neighbouring homes (even if dB is below the permited limit)

DURING A CRITICAL WIND DAY

PERMITED NOISE LIMIT

0   **DISTANCE FROM TURBINE**

Figure 5: The near-neighbour impact zone for Noise. The same regulation since 2006 has dictated that once the decibel level at an impacted home is less than the legislation for night noise in cities, then the impact is deemed negligible. Experience throughout Ireland, and elsewhere, has shown this to be untrue. A similar presentation of impacts can be made for other aspects of a given project. The financial model of the project needs to make sure the impacts have been accounted for before it is deemed financially viable.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The above situation analysis provides insights into what the challenges to earning local support are from people who live with turbines, or the treat of having a turbine, as a neighbour, or who are exposed to the reality around this situation on a regular basis.

There are other opinions as highlighted in Figure 2 above. Yet, most people in the extreme yes or extreme no camp either have not spent time where the others are, or in the case of the extreme yes people who have spent time or live beside turbines, they have what all near neighbours are asking for: a place at the decision-making table for the issues that impact them.

Experience has shown, time and time again, that once all concerned parties agree on the problem, the solution, when well facilitated, can come overnight. If there is not an agreement on the problem, which includes an understanding of the challenges and empathy for the people who experience them, then no matter how good the solution, it cannot work.

Solutions by definition are the flip side of the problem. The solution can only address the problem it is designed to counter.

The literature review that follows this situation analysis shows that many of the conclusions above have also been found through rigorous academic research over the years.

The Guide that follows this situation analyses provides a framework to create solutions needed to meet the challenges outlined above.

If any party to the decisions required to roll out the decarbonisation agenda in Ireland does not believe that the challenges above are real and capture the essence of what needs to be addressed, then this conversation needs to continue to fine tune the above until it does capture their story also. Having the full picture can only add strengths to the solutions applied.

Given the urgency around the climate targets

the government is trying to reach, why have the solutions not been mobilised already? Some believe that due to the continued though waning success of the legalistic Decide, Announce, Defend model, it simply has not been prioritised enough at the top levels of decision making both within the wind industry and within government. Many developers have been heard to say that this is nothing to do with them – they say they are happy to contribute to the community benefit fund and try to improve the Environmental Impact Assessments that they control, but the rest is up to the planning process. Others know that by sharing experiences and connecting the brains who are open to addressing this all over Ireland, that it can be quickly fixed. It will enable the decisions to be made to advance the conversations from the above to workable and fair solutions. The Guide provides a process that works. It will complement, or can lead, other great best practice that many organisations are now developing internally. Together, the right solution for each project will be arrived at. For

expectation management, however, let us remember that turbines need to be proposed in places and under conditions that make sense to the local community. If they are not, then no guide will let us win local support.

Where the required solutions cannot be mobilised simply by following the Guide, the outstanding challenges are highlighted in Section 7 of this programme: "Conclusions, Recommendations and Next Steps".