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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

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.*



EARNING LOCAL SUPPORT FOR ENERGY PROJECTS IN IRELAND

A new approach to hearing, acknowledging and addressing concerns around projects in Ireland. To support successful sustainable outcomes for all concerned.

Neighbours and developers engage to create mutually acceptable agreements.

(Neighbours: those impacted by a project proposal.)



Spring 2021

This RDD Programme is part-funded by the Government of Ireland through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's National Energy Research, Development & Demonstration (RDD) Funding Programme.

HOW THIS PROGRAMME WAS DEVELOPED

THE AIM OF THIS PROGRAMME

- ▶ To research, develop, trial & critically examine a successful approach* to enable developers and project neighbours to design energy projects wanted by both, through an inclusive and informed decision making process.
- ▶ To build confidence in the use of this approach.

7-STEPS TO DELIVER THE PROGRAMME



* Successfully applied to over 20 energy, infrastructure, natural resource and tourism projects in 10 countries.

IS THERE SOMETHING IN THIS FOR BOTH SIDES?

NEIGHBOURS

Aim: 'Only projects that balance community, environment and economic realities in a reasonable way are advanced.'

Requests coming from near-neighbours under this heading include:

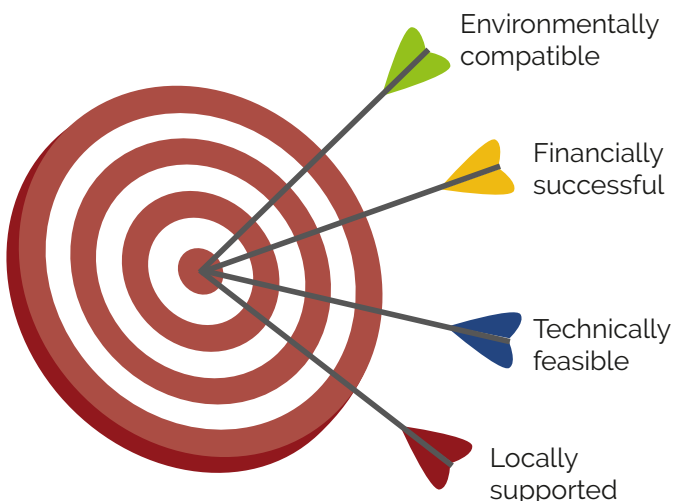
- ▶ neighbours are listened to, acknowledged and involved in decisions that impact them,
- ▶ neighbours are helped to understand all risks and opportunities in time to meaningfully engage with a project's design,
- ▶ the agreed project design supports what community members consider important for their present and future livelihoods and quality of life, and
- ▶ community cohesion and sustainable development is strengthened.

DEVELOPERS

Aim: 'A project is designed that is locally supported resulting not only in time, conflict & money savings, but also becomes easier to finance due to reduced risks.'

Project developers look for the following under this heading:

- ▶ design briefs are agreed with near-neighbours before significant investment is undertaken,
- ▶ easier fund-raising for projects due to reduced risks and enhanced brand value,
- ▶ the developer becomes a preferred choice for wind project developments from a community's perspective, and
- ▶ a quicker journey to permits in the end, and a successful project.



“ A GOAL PROPERLY SET IS HALFWAY REACHED ”
ZIG ZIGLAR

*Is the goal a community's agreement for **A DEVELOPER'S PROJECT**; or an agreement for **A WIN-WIN DEVELOPER & NEAR NEIGHBOUR SUPPORTED PROJECT** that has broad community support?*

KEY QUESTIONS FOR PROJECT PROPONENTS



GUIDED BY INPUT FROM 150+ NEAR-NEIGHBOURS
AND 7 DEVELOPERS, THE FOLLOWING FOUR QUESTIONS
ARE IDENTIFIED AS KEY TO BUILDING LOCAL SUPPORT.

Q 1: What type of project do owners and team members want to build?

LEGALLY COMPLIANT PROJECT?

Project design and planning process conducted to the letter of the law.

Is legally compliant enough?

ACCEPTED PROJECT?

A legally compliant project + all project impacts are transparently acknowledged and addressed, and RESS is applied in a locally appropriate fashion.

What benefits does being accepted bring?

SUPPORTED WIN-WIN PROJECT?

An accepted project + the project design embraces synergies between the sustainable development of both host community and developer.

Should we aim for win-win?

KEY QUESTIONS

FOR PROJECT PROPONENTS

Q 2: As a project is being considered, is the quality of the relationships and trust between the project team and its neighbours being measured, and being built to a level that sustainable agreements can be reached?

The role trust plays between a local community and a developer in the quality of the conversation around a potential project is widely understood. The Social License to Operate (SLO), a measure of the level of acceptance or approval by local communities and stakeholders of an organisation and its projects, can be used to track this. The Guide (Section 4 of this programme) presents a process developed to enable the essential issues for local support of today's energy projects to be practically and effectively addressed.

INCREASING LEVEL OF TRUST & PARTNERSHIP  BETTER PROJECT

Levels of SLO that describe neighbours' attitude towards any given project:



  A SLO CAN SLIP BACKWARDS

Perception of the project proposal by the group from whom the project seeks consent:



Q 3: Is the engagement process in place fit for purpose to reach the desired type of project (as per Q1), and the desired SLO level (as per Q2)?

Experience has shown that there is a lot of good engagement expertise in the industry and within communities. There are also poor levels of engagement, and lots in between.

To help answer the above question, this programme built a cohesive set of guidance through the 7 steps on page 2. When current practice is compared to this, the straight answer is that there is still some way to go before neighbours and shareholders alike can trust there is a systematic, inclusive and responsive approach to address issues of concern held by neighbours. The Guide, and improvements made to it through your feedback, presents a process that enables the above question to be answered in the affirmative.

Q 4: How to ensure an appropriate level of meaningful engagement and shared decision making exists?

This question gives rise to many questions, including:

- ▶ How can we know who to engage with, and at what level, and when?
- ▶ What does 'meaningful engagement' mean?
- ▶ How can we ensure that the right information comes to the right table at the right time to design the optimum project from both the neighbours and the shareholders perspective?

To help answer these questions, and more, the following guidance has been created by this programme:

- ▶ A situation analysis of challenges facing the earning of local support,
- ▶ A literature review to gain insights from researchers in the field,
- ▶ An engagement Guide outlining the steps that have so far been agreed to be necessary by the turbine neighbours and project developers who have partaken in this programme (150+ near-neighbours in 9 Counties in Ireland + input from members of 7 different wind energy development companies),
 - ▶ Case studies demonstrating how components of the Guide were rolled out in Ireland in 2020, together with experience and key learnings from projects with community impacts both in Ireland and overseas.

Input is taken from international standards, guidelines created to support responsible projects such as OECD Meaningful Engagement Guidelines (2017), AA1000SES(2015) and the Equator Principles (2020), Government legislation and the Draft Revised Wind Guidelines (2019).

PROGRAMME DELIVERABLES

This guidance to earn local support for energy projects in Ireland in the 2020s is:

- ▶ relevant to onshore and offshore facilities, big and small.
- ▶ built from experience in wind energy, extractive industry, infrastructure, tourism and community development projects in Ireland & throughout Europe.

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To be adapted for each local reality.
Supporting continuous improvement.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Huge strides were made to get 40% renewable energy generation in Ireland by 2020; thereby increasing the capacity to generate energy without carbon emissions.

Yet many legitimate concerns have been raised that prevent people from fully supporting the widespread deployment of renewable energy technologies. These concerns range from being localised to being applicable to all projects, be they onshore or offshore.

There is a demand that projects contribute to the sustainable development needs of society, near neighbours, host communities, along with being technically feasible, financially viable, and environmentally compatible. When projects balance this well, there is a better outcome for all, and that is a better project - a project that earns its local support.

The wind industry in Ireland has scored high in delivering renewable energy generation capacity, but a Situation Analysis reveals that the industry has the capacity to greatly improve how it conducts its business at a host community and near-neighbour level.

Much work has been done by many to help show a better, less contentious way this improvement can be achieved to deliver the nation's 'Just Energy Transition'. This programme documents this better way.

The areas where some hard work is still needed can be addressed through willingness, guidance, proactive listening and meaningful local partnerships to make striving for win-win projects the norm.

The programme builds on the work done by the government, non-for-profit organisations, wind farm neighbours and those building the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS), and the Wind Energy development Guidelines (WEGs). It benefits from critics of how wind farms are currently developed and what improvements are needed.

The authors are profoundly grateful to everyone who contributed to this programme, especially those on all sides of the arguments who have put much personal energy into bringing about the awareness to enable the required changes.

January 2021.



DOCUMENTING A PROCESS TO WIN-WIN PROJECTS IN IRELAND

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Areas that still benefit from your involvement include:



NO.	COMPONENT	AREAS WHERE YOU CAN BE INVOLVED:
1	Situation Analysis for onshore & offshore wind (from community and developer's perspective)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Add elements that you feel are missing in the Situation Analysis. b) Conduct a situation analysis for your own project or a project being built in your neighbourhood. c) Use b) above to refine your input into a).
2	Help define the goals for a near-neighbour and project proponent's win-win wind energy projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Read the Guide. b) Does this seem reasonable in your experience? If not, what would you add or take away? c) Examine a project you know and please send in the answers to the following two questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) How will (or did) the project contribute to a community's and developer's sustainable development? ii) How will (or did) it take away from supporting local sustainable development?
3	Add to, or edit, the Guide to improve the support to both neighbours and project proponents to successfully design win-win projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Having become familiar with the guidance, identify the optimum split of responsibility for the local support building process between the community, the developer and the authorities. b) Identify and action the low hanging fruit linked to your project/situation. c) Identify areas needing further work.

If you are interested to be involved in this ongoing programme at any level, or would like more information, please send an email to localsupport@astoneco.com or contact **John Aston on 085 2153765**.