

WIND FARMS IN GALWAY, IRELAND EXPAND IN THE MIDST OF OPPOSITION

Renewable sources of energy are in high demand in Ireland today, and wind farms seem to be popping up all over the country. This is because we are edging closer to 2020, and therefore the end of the Irish government's Energy White Paper. The Energy White Paper was published in March 2007 with the aim of promoting sustainable energy, providing a safe and secure energy supply, and delivering economically efficient prices to Irish consumers. The western of Ireland, which contains Europe's most westerly point, is the hub of these wind farms.

According to some commentators, Ireland can be one of the "*windiest places in the world.*" It was therefore an ideal place to focus on building wind turbines.

Vast amounts of land in western Ireland, including Galway, are particularly well-suited for development of wind turbines. This is because the landscape of these areas is made up of mountainous and marsh land and therefore is sparsely populated. The current guidance suggests a distance of five hundred meters from the nearest house, making Galway ideal for wind farm development.

The first commercial wind farm in Ireland was opened in Mayo (roughly twenty miles north of Galway) in 1992. There are over one hundred and fifty wind farms, connected on a grid in the Republic of Ireland today. This development displays the seriousness of the Irish Government in reaching their goals as set out in the Energy White Paper, including promoting sustainable energy before 2020.



Galway currently contains over ten of these wind farms and has many more in the planning phase. These wind farms produce over 413 megawatts of energy, and can provide roughly 112,000 households with power every year.

Wind farms must go through various levels of screening before they can gain planning permission. Ecological screening includes monitoring flight patterns of birds and checking soil depths and stability. Visual screening evaluates the impact wind farms have on the visual amenity of the adjacent area.

Moreover, the proximity to homes and commercial buildings is also taken into account as shadow-flicker and noise pollution can be a problem.

While most people support the installation of wind turbines, there are various groups who oppose wind farm developments. These are mainly community groups which would be referred to as “not in my back-yard” campaigners. These groups have successfully stopped numerous wind farm projects throughout Ireland. One community group in West Galway battled with Galway County Council for over a year concerning the development of a wind farm in their locality. They even picketed the council’s offices. However, the group’s efforts fell on deaf ears this February after An Bord Pleanála (Ireland’s independent appeals board) granted planning permission.



Despite the potential issues surrounding wind farms, I feel that overall, wind farms are a good addition to the Galway landscape.

Landscape architects are involved in the design to help minimize the visual impact. The construction of these wind farms provides much needed employment in areas where employment is scarce. They also provide a renewable source of energy that will always be there, and will help Ireland reduce its carbon footprint for the foreseeable future.

Source: <http://www.globalsiteplans.com/environmental-design/wind-farms-in-galway-ireland-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>