

'WINDFARM HAS RUINED MY FAMILY'S LIFE'

Richard Hobson from Ballycumber is fearful for his children's future after a huge wind turbine was installed right above his house. Ballycumber Wind Farm consists of six wind turbines near Tinahely in South Wicklow.

Richard says the light flicker and noise levels are the "worst possible things" for his two small boys with autism, one of whom has epilepsy and the other hypersensitivity. He says his story is a warning to others that companies can 'quietly put plans in place to build crazy things...uncontested and at odds with the local

for a 6 metre house but this was refused on the grounds it was 'dominant and intrusive or incongruous in the landscape or an area of special amenity value', something he says he finds particularly galling as "they have now allowed a 50-storey turbine to be built above my head."

Richard and partner Elaine spent all their

By Erika Doyle

the house on my week to week wages.

"My home was sold to a vulture fund who pulled every trick in the book but I fought them. We were just moving out of negative equity and now I see above me six skyscraper industrial turbines of 131m each."

Richard says his home has now been devalued to the tune of 40% and he has been left with no choice but to pursue his legal options.

Partner Elaine is devastated by the turn of events. As full-time carer to sons Sean and Daniel, both of whom have severe health conditions and special needs, Elaine feels the full impact of the turbines on a daily basis.

"The children want to be outside," she said. "But after being out there for a while and being exposed to the noise, between 30 and 45 decibels, they get very stressed and upset. A lot of the time now I bring them elsewhere to play. It breaks my heart as we moved here to have space. We used to live in a housing estate in the city but it was too busy and dangerous. We thought we would have the space and tranquility of the countryside here."

"I'm heartbroken that this has happened. We have so many medical appointments with our boys and should be able to retreat into our safe quiet home. People who don't have children with special needs can't understand the effect something like this has on them."

"The natural beauty is now gone, adds Richard. "The peace and quiet is gone for the next 25 years and my home is now seriously and permanently devalued by a Windfarm company, a government body Coilte and a consortium of business people that live far from me and I guarantee wouldn't tolerate a wind farm above them."

"It seems as though County Councils and politicians bend over backwards for big business and laws are only for little people not the big boys."

Ballycumber Wind Farm consists of six wind turbines near Tinahely in South Wicklow and is owned by a consortium including local business



Abbie Breen, Setanta Ballesty, Ronan McCullagh & Dara McGarrigle with Cllr Steven Matthews pictured on a very cold and windy afternoon during North Wicklow Educate Together student Bray Beach clean up. See story on page 6.



Pictured is Richard Hobson

communities' wishes." Richard's story began some years ago when he bought a run-down property on Ballycumber Lane. He applied to Wicklow County Council for planning permission

savings trying to get planning permission, "I was put through the ringer for reports on my house but Wicklow County Council refused on a "height" of 6m. Then when the banks collapsed, I refurbished

men. It was granted planning permission by Wicklow County Council in 2013 and appealed to An Bord Pleanala who upheld the permission. For the past five years the South Wicklow Wind Action Group (SWWAG), led by Richard More O'Ferrall have fought against the introduction of wind farms to their and other rural areas saying they should be located offshore.

Mr More O'Ferrall told *Wicklow Times* that he was well aware of health issues arising from living in proximity (considered to be within 2km) of a wind turbine. "In many cases people must leave their homes. This is what happened in one case in Cork and the court case resulted in the wind farm admitting liability (a landmark High Court action taken by the Shivnon families against Enervon Wind Farm Services. The family claimed their health had been affected by noise from the turbines and Enervon admitted liability).

Mr More O'Ferrall also referred to a quote from Colette Bonner, Deputy Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health who said, "there is a consistent cluster of symptoms related to living in close proximity to wind turbines which occurs in a number of people in the vicinity of industrial wind turbines."

"These people must be treated appropriately and sensitively as these symptoms can be very debilitating."

SWWAG have not given up their battle and say they will work with Mr Hobson while he considers his options.

TO STOP OR NOT?

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Wicklow Alerts said, "In all three N11/M11 incidents that we have become aware of, a dark coloured or grey jeep type vehicle is mentioned. It was described as a VW jeep in one incident."

Garda advise that there is also a legal obligation on motorists to stop when indicated to do so by the Gardai.

So, in the event that you are signalled to stop by blue lights on an unmarked Garda Car and only if you have any reason to doubt that this is a genuine Garda stop, then they advise the following:

1. Keep all doors and windows locked.
2. Slow down/Stop near a lighted area or house if possible.
3. Immediately call 999/112 or a family member, give them your exact location and keep the line open.
4. Engage with whoever stopped you, through a very slightly open window and look for Garda ID (Black leather folder type with Garda Crest and ID card).
5. Make it apparent to the person with whom you are conversing that you are on phone to Gardai/family member.
6. If for any reason you feel threatened or under attack, sound your car horn continuously and attempt to drive off.

"If the above happens immediately contact Gardai if you are not already in contact with them."

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