NEWS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Can't have it both ways on energy

A Chara,

Last week's coverage of opposition to renewable projects in North Galway captures classic Irish hypocrisy. Locals and politicians speak out of both sides of their mouths, supporting green energy principles but then opposing every single proposal without fail. We cannot have it both ways.

I was disappointed The Herald did not show stronger leadership on an issue this consequential. The editorial noted a "glut" of planning applications but does not say how few are actually built and needed. This lack of energy infrastructure hurts communities, through higher bills, through jobs and investment going to regions willing to build, and through the local development, rates and community benefit funds that come with projects actually delivered. Nor does it help a country still dependent on costly imported oil and gas.

The peatland ecology and biodiversity argument against wind turbines (Page 3) is hard to take seriously when many of the same voices defend continued turf cutting on bogs, habitats we are legally obliged to protect. One cannot claim to speak for nature while digging it out every summer and setting it alight every winter.

Ireland's wind and solar potential is enormous, but it is being squandered through knee jerk objections and vote chasing. When the current fuel price shock worsens, as it inevitably will, the same "mouths" will be grumbling the government, or the EU should shield them from costs that faster green deployment would reduce.

Yours etc,
E.W., Athenry
(name and address with Editor)

Planning for solar needs more work

Dear Editor,

Ireland has pushed ahead with large solar farms while leaving important parts of the national planning framework unfinished.

On 16 September, the Housing Minister confirmed that Ireland still had no specific national planning guidelines for solar development and that a National Planning Statement was being prepared.

General planning law, environmental protections and county development plans still apply. But the Government has set ambitious targets without first completing the dedicated national guidance for deciding where these developments belong and how they should be assessed.

Into that gap comes a best-practice guide prepared by the Irish Solar Energy Association and engineering consultants Fehily Timoney. Guidelines only, from the industry itself.

SEAI helped fund it, and public bodies were consulted. Nevertheless, it remains industry-produced guidance rather than binding Government planning standards.

The Irish State should take responsibility for setting the standards against which the industry's applications are judged.

There is also a strategic problem. A national electricity target does not tell us how much development a particular rural area can reasonably accommodate. Several projects concentrated around the same grid connection raise different questions from the same acreage spread across the country. We need consistent decisions about productive farmland, water, landscape, nearby communities and the combined effects of neighbouring developments.

An Taisce raised this planning gap with the Oireachtas in November 2025, reporting that many counties lacked designated areas for solar development and that those with designations appeared to use different criteria.

And here we are, almost one year later, still waiting for the national guidance. Other EU countries offer concrete examples we could learn from.

The Netherlands puts panels on buildings ahead of agricultural and nature land in its national preference hierarchy. Its regional energy strategies consider where, when and how much renewable generation to develop, taking grid capacity into account.

France has specific legal rules for projects combining farming and solar generation. For crop-based projects in that category, the normal rule requires average yields above 90% of a comparable reference without panels, subject to specified exceptions.

That makes the claim that farming will continue something that can actually be measured and checked.

Our electricity infrastructure is a significant issue too. The system already cannot handle all the renewable generation available to it.

EirGrid reported that 11.2% of available renewable generation was turned down in the first half of 2026. It identifies grid constraints, system-security requirements and surplus generation as reasons.

That is wasted potential.

There are grid upgrades underway. But the Government is pushing ahead with more generation while the infrastructure needed to use it is still catching up.

Surely, surely you make sure your infrastructure can handle what you want to produce before you create more waste?

Then there is community engagement.

In our community in Lackagh, Co Galway, we had no meaningful opportunity to influence the Blackthorn Solar Farm plans before submission.

The developer held an information evening on Wednesday. By Friday morning, the site notices were up. We have dated photographs.

What opportunity did that give residents to raise concerns and have them properly considered before the application went in?

Albert Dolan [TD] raised our community's experience in the Dáil on 30 September and called for clear solar planning guidelines.

We now have five weeks to work through the application, understand the technical reports and prepare our submissions.

Ireland has introduced faster permitting under the EU's RED III directive. Yet the ordinary five-week submission window remains for applications like ours. The implementing regulations did not introduce a general minimum period for developers to consult neighbours before submission.

These developments can remain for decades. It is absolutely shocking that communities can receive so little meaningful engagement beforehand.

We need clear national requirements. Developers should demonstrate that construction traffic can safely pass schools, that drainage will work in the actual ground conditions, and that they have properly assessed glare and effects on water and wildlife.

They should explain the impact on existing farming and secure restoration when the development ends.

And they should engage with communities early enough for local knowledge and concerns to influence the plans.

Whether you agree with solar farms, disagree with solar farms, or couldn't care less about solar farms, that should be a basic expectation.

The Government needs to finish the rules, coordinate the infrastructure and require meaningful community engagement before applications go in.

Regards,
Tony Higgins
Lackagh, Co Galway



CHAPEL Lane in Tuam (submitted by letter writer).

Restore historical site

Dear Editor,

Chapel Lane in Tuam is the location of the site of the first Catholic church allowed in Tuam since the relaxation of the Penal Laws (encl). The current state of such an important historical site is reprehensible and is indicative of the lack of respect and interest that Galway Co. Council has for Tuam's historical build heritage.

They are happy to waste taxpayers' money on nonsense in the Palace Grounds yet leave this historical site in such a state and inaccessible. Electricity sub-stations, overflowing wheelie bins and general waste is a disgraceful state for this site to be left in.

With the locals doing so much wonderful work in presenting Tuam in a good light, it is incumbent on the Galway County Council to sort this out properly. Don't throw a few € at pointless repointing the stonework but perform a full audit with the view to restoring the site to a reasonable state, get the junk out permanently and make safe access for people who wish to visit and stop wasting money on the Palace Grounds.

Regards,
Rodger Waters
Tuam

Motorway barrier system could protect lives – cllr

By Mark Walsh

A MECHANISM to stop vehicles driving the wrong way on motorways has been mooted by a Williamstown councillor.

Cllr Declan Geraghty made the suggestion at a recent Ballinasloe MDC meeting, following the fatal two-car collision on the M9 in Kildare.

"We had a tragedy in Ballinasloe (in 2021) of a car going the wrong way on the motorway and there was a crash (when four people died). I remember saying it at the time why wasn't there a barrier or some sort of prevention to stop people going down the wrong way," he said.

"These things have to be put in place. It can happen to old people, who can make a mistake. I implore people in the Council to talk to the relevant people, to talk to people in the Department of Transport.

"It needs to be done all over the country. I can't understand when they're designing motorways why it's not being put in place. It's common sense and it's about protecting people's lives."

Cllr Evelyn Parsons said that such a preventative measure would be helpful given the ageing population.

Conrad Harley, senior roads engineer, said the local authority has no responsibility for motorways and the matter was something he would raise with the TII.

"In general, they are trying to design roundabouts to be very difficult to get down onto the wrong side of the motorway," offered Mr Harley.

Thieves steal expensive tools from Tuam centre

A BURGLARY at the Brú Bhríde Men's Shed in Tuam resulted in the theft of a large quantity of tools and equipment.

The incident occurred sometime between 1pm on Friday, October 2 and 5pm on Sunday, October 4.

A spokesperson for the centre said online that the tools were purchased to support the members of the Men's Shed and to carry out projects that benefit the wider community.

They described the incident as heartbreaking, noting that a community organisation had been specifically targeted.

The thieves are believed to have gained access through the back gate and forced entry through double doors at the premises.

Items stolen included a Dewalt impact drill, two Ford routers, two angle grinders, two chainsaws, several electrical tools, a Makita air gun and a small angle grinder.

Gardaí are appealing to anyone who may have witnessed any person or vehicles acting suspiciously in the area between the given date or who has been offered any of these items for sale to contact Tuam Garda Station on 093-70840 or the Garda confidential line on 1800666111.