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Dear Planning Department,

**Re: Application Reference: LA01/2023/0008/F - Brishey (Benbradagh) windfarm**

I request that this letter, together with any previous letters I may have submitted, be registered as my formal objection to the above proposed development on Benbradagh Mountain.

Wind turbines should never have been allowed on Benbradagh mountain. Members of the community expressed concerns to local councillors when Evishagaran windfarm was initially submitted for planning, and were assured at the time that the scheme would not breach the ridgeline nor be visible on the west-facing, Dungiven-side of the mountain. The PAC approved Evishagaran windfarm on the basis that the turbines did not breach the unique, iconic ridgeline - identified and protected under planning policy and guidelines.

Yet here we are, fighting against further encroachment entailed by this current application, with four even larger turbines proposed nearer the ridgeline of the mountain, which will dominate the skyline of one of the most iconic mountains in the North, and be visible throughout the surrounding area. The proposed 150m (500 feet) high turbines and the huge swept path of their 136m diameter moving blades would irreversibly damage and undermine the landmark.

Benbradagh is a key landmark in the Sperrins AONB, and has visual prominence across the North West and to the many thousands that travel on the A6 Glenshane route. It is a vital tourism asset, used prolifically in marketing for the area. Noted as the Gateway to the Sperrins, it is renowned for hang-gliding and offers panoramic views that attract visitors from across Ireland. The proposal would undermine considerable investment and efforts by locals to promote sustainable tourism in the area.

Benbradagh is inextricably bound up with our identity yet there seems to be a complete lack of understanding of, or utter disregard for, the deep connection between the people and the mountain. Benbradagh has long been celebrated in song and story, both ancient and modern, and famously featured as the album title for Cara Dillon's 'Hill of Thieves'. 'Binn Fhada Rí Chiannachta' was the name of the mountain recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters and means 'the long ridge of the King of Ciannacht'. The mountain shelters the town of Dungiven, it is the backdrop to our lives and provides a place of serenity for our wider community and visitors alike.

While I support renewable energy, this proposal represents unacceptable saturation of the Dungiven and Roe Valley area. We, the people, feel overwhelmed and besieged by the extent of wind energy developments in our area, and angered at the collective loss of so many local landmarks. Developer downplaying of impacts and assertions at planning stage that positioning of turbines a slight distance away from summits preserves the integrity of the landscape, have not held true in real-life. We are at a crucial tipping point. There is next-to-no visual relief – Benbradagh is the last untouched significant ridgeline around the Roe Valley. The current proposal risks complete erosion of our natural and cultural heritage and identity, and alienation of our community.

There are already over 111 turbines within a 9-mile radius of Dungiven (excluding Dunmore and Dunbeg windfarms on the Limavady to Coleraine Road which entail approximately 36

additional turbines). The Roe Valley Scenic Route has become saturated with wind farms that do not comply with cumulative separation distances. The addition of this proposed windfarm on Benbradagh would result in an overwhelming concentration of industrial structures, severely impacting visual amenity and landscape character. A full and comprehensive cumulative impact assessment of visual and natural heritage impacts, of existing and proposed turbines, has not been carried out.

The proposal will also potentially prevent access along the customary walkway over the top of the mountain that links Dungiven with Glenullin (*Gleann an Iolair* – the glen of the eagle). With the recent PAC approval of Magheramore windfarm beside Banagher Nature Reserve, there is growing community concern as to loss of public access to the countryside (already limited in the area, and significantly less than urban counterparts as detailed in research), and the industrialisation and loss of landscape character and tranquillity of our existing ‘accessible-for-all’ amenity spaces.

The wider social, economic, and political context must also be considered. The Sperrins AONB is a disadvantaged area that has suffered from historical underdevelopment and underinvestment. It was first designated in 1968, but it is the only AONB not to have had the benefit of a robust management plan, unlike the other seven designated areas. The lack of a coherent AONB management plan, and delay in progressing an updated Local Development Plan (LDP) for the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area, has left our community vulnerable to piecemeal industrialisation and salami-sliced windfarm development and is resulting in damage to the distinctive character of the fragile Sperrins AONB landscape, while other AONBs thrive under careful stewardship and protection.

Under legislation and planning policy, the onus is on the Council to ensure compliance with AONB designated objectives—conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and heritage of the mountain, promote its enjoyment by the public, and maintain access. ‘Exceptional circumstances’ for renewable energy has been applied to such a degree in our area that there is now significant imbalance and inequality. The Council needs to appreciate the consequences of their decisions to date and the implications of any further approvals - they have a responsibility to protect our area and the Sperrins AONB from any further developments in the absence of a robust AONB management plan and updated LDP, and to preserve and protect our mountain, the landscape character of our AONB, our unique cultural identity, and ensure equality of access to the countryside.

The Council must incorporate a human rights based approach into energy transition plans and ensure compliance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

I urge the Planning Department to REFUSE THIS APPLICATION and to prioritise the long-term protection of Benbradagh, the Sperrins AONB, and our wider community.

Yours sincerely,

**[Name]**

**[Address]**

**[Date]**