PRESS RELEASE

AMASS welcomes landmark Bellville Solar refusal: "The community asked for openness and proper assessment. Galway County Council has delivered a clear answer."

2 October 2026

AMASS – Abbeyknockmoy & Monivea Against Solar Sprawl – welcomes Galway County Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the proposed Bellville Solar Project.

The Council refused the 239-hectare, 40-year solar development on **11 separate grounds** following approximately **374 public submissions and observations**–an extraordinary level of public participation for a planning application of this kind.

AMASS thanks every resident, farmer, family, business owner and community member who gave their time, shared evidence, attended meetings, asked difficult questions and made formal submissions. This decision reflects the determination, care and perseverance of a community that refused to be ignored.

A clear and serious refusal

Galway County Council's decision is not based on one narrow issue. Its planner's report identifies serious concerns across the proposed development, including uncertainty about the wider project and its necessary grid connection, unresolved legal consents, flood risk, public-road safety, water infrastructure, overhead electricity lines, archaeological protection, glint and glare, and the adequacy of environmental assessment.

Most significantly, the Council concluded that it could not exclude adverse effects on the integrity of the **Lough Corrib Special Area of Conservation**. The Council found the applicant's Appropriate Assessment screening information to be inconsistent and inadequate, including in relation to hydrological connectivity, underground cabling and the reliance on construction mitigation measures to protect water quality.

The Council also found that the application did not provide enough adequate information for a robust Environmental Impact Assessment screening determination. It raised major concerns regarding flood-prone areas and the absence of clear design detail for panels in sensitive locations, as well as the potential for construction and drainage works to create wider flood risks.

The Council further concluded that:

- the applicant had not clearly demonstrated all required legal interests, landowner approvals and consents;
- the wider solar, grid and substation proposal was premature and insufficiently defined;
- the local road network could not safely accommodate the proposed traffic and abnormal loads;
- proposed works risked conflict with public water infrastructure;
- the archaeological assessment was deficient and incomplete; and
- the proposed layout failed to demonstrate required safety clearances from overhead electricity infrastructure.

These are not cosmetic matters. They go to whether a project of this scale was properly described, properly assessed, properly designed and capable of being safely delivered in this rural location.

A community that did its homework

AMASS has never opposed renewable energy in principle. Our position has always been straightforward: major energy infrastructure must be honest, transparent, properly assessed and located where it does not place an unfair burden on rural families, farmland, wildlife, water, heritage, local roads and community life.

For more than a year, local people have asked for clarity about the actual development being proposed: the solar arrays, the grid connection, the 220kV substation, battery storage, cabling, access roads, drainage, construction impacts and the relationship of these elements to Oakwood South.

The community did not ask for special treatment. It asked for the basic standards any developer should meet: **openness, honesty, transparency and a complete, coherent proposal capable of public scrutiny.**

Instead, residents were required to piece together a technically complex project from evolving consultation material, inconsistent documentation, maps, planning reports and separate references to future infrastructure. That is not meaningful engagement. It is not good planning.

Galway County Council's decision confirms that the community was right to ask questions—and right to persist until they were answered.

Respect for the planning process

AMASS acknowledges the work of Galway County Council's planning staff and the public bodies that assessed this very large and technically complex proposal. The Council's decision records that it considered the submissions and observations received and identified substantial deficiencies in the application material.

This is exactly how the planning system should work: communities participate, evidence is tested, public bodies apply the law and policy, and decisions are made in the public interest.

AMASS also recognises that landowners make decisions in difficult circumstances. Our concern has never been to blame neighbours. The responsibility lies with developers and decision-makers to ensure that projects brought forward are clear, lawful, properly assessed and genuinely compatible with the places in which people live and farm.

The message is clear

The Bellville proposal was not refused because residents objected to solar panels in the abstract. It was refused because the Council identified fundamental shortcomings in a large, multi-parcel industrial-energy proposal affecting fourteen townlands.

A project cannot be assembled through ambiguity. It cannot depend on unclear land consents. It cannot leave essential grid infrastructure uncertain. It cannot defer core environmental, archaeological, flooding and safety questions until after the public has been asked to accept decades of industrial infrastructure.

The message to Heron Solar, Power Capital Renewable Energy and every developer considering rural Galway is clear:

Communities are entitled to know what is proposed, where it is proposed, how it will operate, who will bear the risks and whether it has been assessed lawfully and properly.

A glossy brochure, a virtual consultation room and generic assurances are no substitute for a complete, evidence-based and transparent planning application.

A milestone, not an endpoint

This is an important milestone for Abbeyknockmoy, Monivea, Ballyglunin and the surrounding townlands. It is a testament to the courage and commitment of ordinary people who refused to accept that decisions about their homes, farms, landscape and future should be made without them.

AMASS will continue to monitor developments carefully and will keep the community informed of any formal next steps.

For today, we thank every person who stood up, spoke out, submitted evidence, raised funds, attended meetings and supported neighbours. **This decision belongs to the planning process, but the strength behind it came from the community.**

ENDS

AMASS – Abbeyknockmoy & Monivea Against Solar Sprawl
Website: www.amass.ie
Email: info@amass.ie