



Locals from the Donamon area and students from Lisniskey National School pictured at the site of the proposed telecommunications mast in Donamon on Tuesday morning last. Pic: Andrew Fox.

'We are concerned for our health, and the health of our children'

■ Paul Healy

The people of Oran and Donamon are united – and angry. On a beautiful, sunny Tuesday morning a massive protest against Eircom plans for a mast in the area leaves the Roscommon People in no doubt about the strength of feeling in the community.

The people of Oran and Donamon do not want this mast – not at this location anyway – and they are speaking with one voice, from the oldest member of the community to the youngest school-going child.

It is a beautiful part of the county, and it looks particularly beautiful on this gorgeous day. At the site of the proposed mast, children from Lisniskey NS, accompanied by their Principal, Noel Dervan, hold placards aloft. 'NO MAST HERE' is the clear message. Men and women mingle in a united stance against what they see as a profound intrusion on the tranquillity of the area. The mast, which was turned down by Roscommon County Council but put back 'on the agenda' by An Bord Pleanala, is to be located just thirty metres from Michael and Claire Hussey's impressive farmhouse. Just twelve metres from their slated shed. This, despite it being made clear in the current Roscommon County Development Plan that no mast should be erected closer than 100 metres to a house. The protestors aren't angry with Roscommon Council, but they are angry with An Bord Pleanala – and with Eircom.

Michael Lambert is a promi-

nent member of the Oran Donamon Action Group. He told the Roscommon People about the exhaustive efforts which a very united local community has engaged in in their bid to prevent this development.

Pointing out that local people aren't opposed to an Eircom mast being located in the vicinity ("there has been an Eircom telephone exchange on the site for years") Mr. Lambert said that the idea of radiation for TETRA technology being emitted from a mast which is just thirty metres from a private residence is something the community cannot accept.

"They have about 32 masts located within a 10-mile radius of here, the area is saturated with masts. Why can't they co-locate (i.e. put the service on an existing mast)? We believe they could, as they have done it elsewhere."

Mr. Lambert pointed out that, far from being a 'barren area,' the region is quite well populated. He said there are 64 houses in close proximity to the Eircom site, a school is located less than a mile from the proposed mast and there's a crèche nearby as well.

Michael Lambert's neighbour, Michael Hussey, is openly emotional about the trauma caused to his family since the mast controversy erupted. It is, he says, a strain in his life, something that is affecting his sleep and threatening his livelihood. There are sleepless nights, concerns about the health of his family and uncertainty about the future.

Michael (44) is married to Claire (nee Harrington). The

couple have three children, Micheal (5), Anna (4) and Seamus (2). They are a hard-working couple who are deeply passionate about the land and the

We would consider moving, but who would buy our house if there's a mast thirty metres from it?"

The 'thirty metres' aspect an-



Students from Lisniskey National School pictured at the site of the proposed telecommunications mast in Donamon on Tuesday morning last. Pic: Andrew Fox.

countryside. They have been devastated by the prospect of a mast literally overshadowing their beloved home.

"We are the third generation of Husseys to live in this house, my family have been here since the 1940's," Michael told the Roscommon People. Yet he has not ruled out the prospect of moving. "Of course we would have to consider moving if this goes ahead. We are concerned for our health and the health of our children. We are concerned too about the possible impact of radiation on animals. Our livelihood could be threatened.

gers the Hussey family and all other concerned neighbours. They feel that the Roscommon County Development Plan is exposed as not being worth the paper it is printed on. The Plan insists that any mast such as the one envisaged by Eircom should be at least one hundred metres from the nearest house.

Michael Hussey and Michael Lambert show the Roscommon People the site, and sigh at the inequality they feel is at play. They say Eircom's mast was originally meant to go on the 'southern border', but now Eircom proposes to place it in

the 'northern border' – and are claiming that reference to the 'southern border' was merely a "clerical error." The men say that Eircom are showing no regard for the people of the locality. They accuse Eircom of ignoring calls for meetings. "Two guys were sent down a while back but they were on an information-gathering exercise."

Michael Hussey is deeply frustrated by it all. "Our neighbours have been fantastic, but we have not been well supported by local TDs, Michael Finneran and Denis Naughten." Michael Lambert agrees that TDs have not been very helpful, but says that Roscommon County Council and local councillors have been. Both men say the impression they are getting from the TDs is that their hands are tied, that An Bord Pleanala is "untouchable."

But they are not giving up. Influential community activist and local businessman John F. Hanley says the community is determined to keep the campaign going. John F. is strongly opposed to the imposition of a mast so close to the Hussey household. He too has been to the forefront in rallying the community on this issue. The Oran Donamon Action Group are continuing their campaign, holding public meetings and actively considering seeking a Circuit Court injunction against the companies involved in this proposed project.

Michael Lambert confirms that the Oran Donamon Action Group is now considering taking a legal route and that their options were discussed as recently as Tuesday night of this

week. There is some resentment that the legal route may be necessary. "It is very wrong that people in the locality have to go to this (legal) expense. Meanwhile Eircom are running for cover and won't communicate with us. Do you know what really annoys us? We were told that because of the strategic importance of the mast...that even though there are families nearby...it's an acceptable compromise!" They want to know what families form 'an acceptable compromise.' What is acceptable?

One thing's for certain – any threat to health is not considered acceptable to the people of the area. "We believe this radiation can have very damaging effects," says Michael Hussey. "It can cause cancer, it can cause sleeping disorders. Why should we accept it?"

As photographer Andrew Fox photographs members of the community, people pass in cars and lorries and honk their support. Later, the locals disperse, and we enjoy a cup of coffee in the Hussey household. Claire speaks of the mast issue being a scourge. The controversy clouds the area on this cloudless day.

Michael sees me to the door, a decent man still venting frustration, still searching for a resolution and for sleep-filled nights. The sun is shining and the gardens brim with daffodils. It is rural Ireland in stunning splendour. The kids run around in the April sunshine, stepping slowly into their futures.

Thirty metres away, the site wait for its mast and the area waits for the consequences.