

Vital decision on mast location expected soon

■ Paul Healy

A decision on the short-term fate of Eircom's controversial plans for a mast in the Donamon area is expected within the coming days.

On 18th of February, 2008, Eircom applied for planning permission for a 25-metre support pole to carry three radio aerials at the Eircom exchange, Gortici-meelra, Donamon. The proposed mast will use TETRA technology, the aerials intended for use by the emergency services (eg. Gardai, Ambulance personnel, Fire Brigade).

A number of objections were lodged by people in the Oran/Donamon area. Those objecting included individuals and groups, including Oran Donamon Action Group, which was formed in response to concerns about the mast proposals. The group argues that there are legitimate health and safety concerns relating to the technology involved. A petition opposing the development has been signed by almost 600 locals.

On 30th of July, 2008, Roscommon County Council refused planning permission, pointing out that it was contrary to the County Development Plan 2008-2014 – in that a mobile communications mast cannot be sited within 100 metres of a dwelling house. (The Hussey family home is within thirty metres of the planned development).

Threefold, a company acting for Eircom, subsequently lodged an appeal with An Bord Pleanála (on the 16th of August, 2008). The board overturned the decision of Roscommon County Council on the 18th of February, 2009. Some conditions applied, including that the mast be located at the southern boundary of the site.

Last October Threefold attempted to begin work on the project but, on foot of complaints, Roscommon County Council stepped in to prevent the work commencing on the grounds that some of the conditions set down by An Bord Pleanála had not been met.

It became clear that locating the pole at the southern boundary of the site would require felling or reducing in size a tree which is on the property of Michael Hussey, i.e. adjoining the Eircom site. The apparent ease with which new locations on the site can be proposed or agreed upon has infuriated protestors and this crucial aspect of the saga was recently discussed at a meeting of Roscommon County Council.

At that meeting, Mr. John Cunningham, Director of Services, Roscommon County Council, said that the local authority had sought legal advice on the issue of the location of the mast. The 'clerical error' explanation stands, with An Bord Pleanála saying that it does not represent a material change.

Now there is renewed uncertainty about the fate of the mast due to the issue of what part of the Eircom site it can be constructed upon. Eircom may yet have to again re-visit the question of where they can locate the mast, and the company may have to seek the consent of a landowner affected by the latest choice of location. However, given An Bord Pleanála's decision last year, the project looks set to eventually proceed – that

is unless the local community achieves some dramatic legal breakthrough over the coming months.

Mr. Frank Flanagan, Senior Planner with Roscommon County Council, has stated that An Bord Pleanála has not



Michael Lambert, John F Hanley and Michael Hussey pictured at the site of the proposed telecommunications mast in Donamon on Tuesday morning last. Pic: Andrew Fox.

given any flexibility in relation to the location of the support pole (or mast).

While the mast was originally to be located on the southern boundary of the Eircom site, it now has to be moved to the northern boundary. Protestors say this is because building it at the southern boundary would have meant cutting a mature tree which is not on the land owned by Eircom. The past references to the southern boundary have now been deemed to be a 'clerical error' and the new location is the northern boundary. However that in turn raises the question of whether or not moving the location to the northern boundary will impact on another landowner.

Mr. Frank Flanagan acknowledges this in correspondence (dated 26th of March, 2010) to Mr. John Cunningham, Director of Services, Roscommon Co. Council: "...If the Planning Authority were to agree to location as proposed, it would run the risk of the decision to agree being challenged by members of the public affected by it....the acceptance of the developer's proposal could also leave the Planning Authority to deal with future complaints about unauthorised development for not complying with conditions..."

Mr. Flanagan concludes: "The present proposal from the developer is not sufficient to meet the terms of the condition and I would not recommend agreement be reached..." (He advises that the developer should be requested to submit alternative proposals and makes the point that the developer could investigate getting the consent of the adjoining landowner).

Modesty, the Masters and Mattie

It's a lovely Monday morning and as I look out the window at about half past seven I realise, once again, that, like the Carlsberg ad says, we have probably the best and most beautiful country in the world. The mist is just rising, and while growth is still a long way behind what it should normally be, nonetheless, the countryside is looking greener and there is a feel good factor about the whole thing.

Yesterday, Sunday, was similarly nice and, thank God, it was my turn to have the day off. I spent as much time outside as I could, and when I eventually headed back to the house, as darkness fell, I found myself watching the final stages of the US Masters. Sadly, no Irishman had managed to get past the opening two days, but in their absence two Englishmen, Lee Westwood and Ian Poulter had tied for the lead at the halfway stage, and while Poulter had fallen away, as I settled into the armchair on Sunday evening, Westwood was still there, although by now he was involved in an enthralling battle with a couple of emerging Asian golfers and the present American idol, Phil Mickelson.

The Tiger, on his return, was also threatening to complete a most amazing comeback, but a disaster at the 14th when he took three putts from about five foot (which even me or Duff would have probably bettered) effectively took him out of the equation. Fred Couples was still flying the flag for the older generation but despite a remarkable effort by the 50-year-old, he too was to fall a little bit short. However, the fact that he was in contention at all was amazing in itself because he has suffered a bad back that on occasions he has to have physiotherapy, just to keep going. Now sometimes we don't give back trouble the sympathy and respect it deserves, but, as someone who only last week had to attend the doctor with a back, that felt as if someone was holding a red hot poker to it, I can fully appreciate the problem, and applaud his great effort in staying at, or near the top for so long.

Yet when all was over, we had another emotional winning moment to rank up there with the Aldaniti/Bob Champion victory in the Grand National in the 80's, with Clare getting rid of Biddy Earley's curse when winning the All-Ireland in 1995, and with Ireland's Grand Slam victory last year after a 60 year wait, when Phil Nickelson donned the green jacket for the third time. His wife, Amy, has had a year-long battle with breast cancer, as has her mother, and so big Phil's preparations were anything but good.

As I drove to work on Thursday morning (for some reason the radio, which is not quite as trusty as the old Volvo, decided to work), John Duggan, the tipster on Today FM gave his tips for the Masters. He said Paul Casey and Luke Donald were the most likely Europeans (they both by the wayside before the half way cut), he said Nickelson would definitely not be in the right frame of mind, and that Westwood and Poulter were complete no-hopers. You could say he got it slightly wrong but I suppose it's like predicting the winner in the National, you should just stick in a pin!

Speaking of the Grand National, wasn't it fantastic to see Tony McCoy, finally, make it to the winners enclosure? He spoke afterwards of the fact that despite having ridden over 3,000 winners, he badly wanted to win the Aintree Grand National, without which, as he jokingly put it, his CV would not have been complete. It goes without saying that I didn't back him, but judging by the amount the leading bookies claim to have lost, I must be the only one who didn't! Anyway well done to himself and Nickelson, both stories had a 'happy ending' feel to them.

As for the rest of the weekend sport, it was another great one for Irish rugby. Munster defied every logic in beating English Premiership leaders, Northampton, even without Lion's captain, Paul O'Connell! Leinster were decidedly fortunate against French visitors Clermont Auvergne, whose place kicker Brock James had a huge off day, while pride of place must go to Connacht who prevailed by three points over Bourgoin in the Sportsground in the quarter final of the Amlin Challenge Cup. Their reward is to face another big time French outfit, Toulon, who will have the great Johnny Wilkinson in their team on the May Bank Holiday weekend in Galway. It should be a great occasion but if Connacht are to progress it will take an almighty effort, as the French side was very impressive in getting past the Scarlets at the weekend. It all adds up to another super rugby weekend and wouldn't it be wonderful if the three Irish Provinces are still standing.

In soccer, Man United seem to have blown their chance of another Premiership title, but nothing can compare to Celtic's loss in the Scottish Cup semi final to Ross County. It would be something similar to Creggs

Utd (which has been defunct for about 20 years) beating teams like Bohemians or Shamrock Rovers. It's a result of seismic proportions and could have an effect on Celtic for the rest of the season. Robbie Keane must be wondering how he ever went there, although his real club Spurs, suffered their own embarrassing defeat when, later in the day they lost out in the FA Cup semi-final to relegated Portsmouth. It has been said that the FA Cup has lost its magic but when you get results like that, it shows it can still sparkle.

On Friday last, I met Kathleen McDonagh, and she told me that it was five years on Saturday since the death of her husband, Galway legend, the great Mattie. I wrote briefly about Mattie a couple of years ago, but it just struck me, after talking to Kathleen, that I don't think I ever met anyone who loved sport so much. He may have been, and probably will remain so, the most decorated Connacht footballer ever, with four All-Ireland medals, but he was just as happy playing soccer or golf or tennis or racquetball or anything else for that matter, with anyone who was able and available to play with him regardless of the other person's ability or rather lack of same. I know because I played all four, as well as football and rugby with Mattie, and particularly in golf and racquetball, I suffered many a hammering at this hands. His will to win, and his delight when doing so were legendary and I suppose that's why he had his four All-Ireland medals. His singing ability too, was above normal, and his version of the classic 'North to Alaska' brought many a house down. As I've said before, modesty is more often found in the very best of people than in the other kind, and two of the best ever Connacht footballers – Mattie and the great Jimmy Murray each had that trait in abundance. It's hard to believe that it's five years ago since we lost the great Galway man but his memory is still as clear as ever.

Continuing with great Connacht footballers, I would like to extend my best wishes to the former Roscommon great, Dermot Earley, as he continues his battle against illness. I came up against him on the football field, many times back in the 70's when he was at his absolute best for Michael Glavey's and like Mattie in the golf, I came off second best on all occasions. He is a gentleman in every way, and I wish him well.

Finally for this week, best wishes to two of my next neighbours, Gibby (Jacinta Hanly) and Joseph Morgan who have birthdays around now! So too has Karen and all in the 14th April Club, Ann Naughton, James Scott, Ger Kelly and of course myself. By the time you read this, some of us will have already clocked up another one, so I'd like to wish myself and everyone else 'Happy Birthday'!

Till next week

Bye for now.

PS. Creggs GAA is holding a table quiz in O'Roarke's this Friday night, April 16th at 10 pm. As usual, Dowdy is setting the questions! The Devaneys are putting up their crown yet again and I'm sure you'll all be there to see if they can be dethroned. It's all a good bit of craic, so please come along and support the lifeblood of the parish. Your local GAA club needs you!



Frankly
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