

Storm over windfarm plan

Years after part of coast stripped of outstanding beauty status

Families flee homes after huge farm blaze

ADRIAN RUTHERFORD

Part of Northern Ireland's most popular beauty spots could be ruined if a proposed offshore windfarm leads to pylons across the countryside, it was claimed today. The warning came after it emerged that a stretch of picturesque Co Down coastline has been unmarked for a huge offshore windfarm.

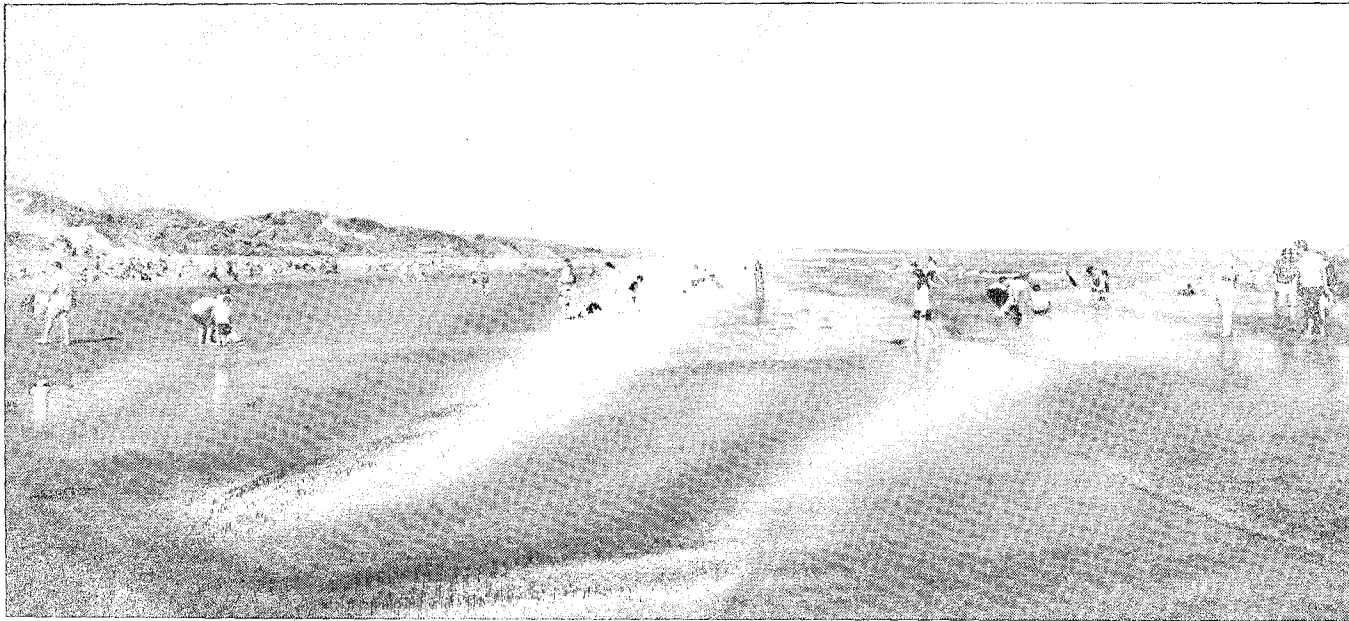
A recent Government report highlights the Dundrum Bay area as having huge potential for wind power generation.

It coincides with a decision by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to strip part of the coastline of its status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The region, which includes Tyrella's Blue Flag beach, is one of Northern Ireland's most scenic areas.

The report, by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, concluded that a "substantial capacity could be developed without significant adverse effects on the environment and other marine users".

Green Party councillor Cadoogan Enright warned the declassification would be the only point on the coastline where power



Tyrella's Blue Flag beach in Co Down, which faces being stripped of its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status

nect the windfarm to the grid.

He is concerned that removing the AONB status, which imposes strict guidelines on development, could lead to a series of pylons being erected.

"The difficulty isn't with the windfarm, it is de-designating the Area of Outstanding Natural

he said today. "When the cables come on shore, are they going to be buried, as they would be in England?"

"Or will they be put on giant pylons, carried up the beach and over the hill, through this area?"

"I see no other explanation for de-designating this area other than for infrastructure to trans-

port many megawatts of electricity onshore and onto the grid."

Mr Enright said regulations now allowed authorities to manage and improve the coastline in areas with AONB status.

"If they de-designate this bit, it will be the only area on the entire coast that we will not be able to improve" he added.

He said there was widespread opposition from various agencies, including Down District Council and the Mourne Heritage Trust.

A spokesman for the NIEA said a decision on the final boundary of the AONB had not been taken, and did not take account of any current or potential development proposals.

BY CATHERINE LYNAGH

FAMILIES in a Co Londonderry town were forced to leave their homes after a 50ft fire took hold at farm buildings.

At least four families were evacuated at 5am on Saturday while seven fire engines tackled the blaze at out-buildings on Carrowreagh Road in Garvagh.

Police have confirmed they are treating the blaze as suspicious.

Local resident Beverly Galloway was one of those forced to leave her home, along with her husband and two young children.

She said: "It was unbelievable to see the flames so high and very sad to see the building go, I have never seen such a huge fire. We understood the dangers and were happy to evacuate for the sake of our children."

Peter O'Reilly, from the NI Fire and Rescue Service, said his men fought the flames for five hours.

"A number of houses were evacuated because there was a risk of explosion due to the fertiliser in the premises," he said.

"Because it was an old building it had a corrugated ceiling which was made out of asbestos. When asbestos is heated the smoke can contain very small particles."