

**MINUTES OF NATIONAL PLANNING KNOWLEDGE GROUP MEETING
HELD ON 6 MAY 2026 AT 11.00AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Niall Cussen, Chair
Dr Berna Grist, Vice-Chair
Philip Boland, Queens University Belfast
Shane Burke, Housing Agency
Erika Casey, An Coimisiún Pleanála
Caroline Creamer, Maynooth University
Gerard Crowley, RTPI
David Duffy, Land Development Agency
Justin Gleeson, Maynooth University

Niamh Lennon, MARA
David O'Connor, Technological University Dublin
Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes, LGMA
Seán O'Leary, Irish Planning Institute
Tadhg O'Mahony, Environmental Protection Agency
Eoin O'Neill, University College Dublin
Gavan Rafferty, RTPI
Karen Ray, University College Cork
Alma Walsh, DHLGH

APOLOGIES:

Noel Cahill, NESC
Deirdre French, Environmental Protection Agency
Tommy Moylan, AILG

Emer Uí Fhátharta, CCMA
Aidan Sweeney, Ibec

IN ATTENDANCE

On behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Aoibheann Nevin, Anne Marie Gavin

From the Office of the Planning Regulator

Caren Gallagher
Sinéad Mullen
Mary Murphy

John Keating
Edward Lawlor
Ciara O'Connor

INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

OPENING ADDRESS

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

AGENDA

The Chair noted that the agenda and meeting papers were circulated to the Group in advance of the meeting. The Chair tabled the agenda and the following items were discussed.

ITEM 1 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 FEBRUARY 2026

No comments were received. As there were no objections or corrections, the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting and were approved.

ITEM 2 – UPDATE ON RESEARCH PROJECTS AND OTHER RELATED WORK

(i) Update from the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) on the RTPI-Commissioned Research on Cross-Border Planning on the Island of Ireland

The Chair noted the recent publication of the RTPI-commissioned research report on 'Strategic Spatial Planning and the Framework for Cooperation: Strengthening Alignment on the Island of Ireland'.

The Chair invited some of the authors of the report, from the ICLR team, to provide an overview of the research.

They outlined:

- The aims, scope and policy context of the research;
- The areas of alignment and divergence in the Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland i.e. the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and the National Planning Framework – First Revision (NPF) respectively;
- The assessment of the impact of the ‘Framework for Co-operation’ on Strategic Spatial Planning coordination; and
- Conclusions and recommendations.

A brief discussion ensued regarding:

- The on-going work between the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and the Department for Infrastructure (NI);
- The opportunity to review the RDS;
- Environmental monitoring;
- The potential for parallel research in relation to marine spatial planning;
- The role of funding in supporting the collation and sharing of cross-border data, acknowledging that there are issues with data compatibility which also need to be addressed.

The Chair thanked the ICLRD for the presentation and the RTPI for commissioning the research.

(ii) Update from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

The DHLGH provided an update on:

- The progress achieved by local authorities in complying with the Section 28 guidelines on NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements (published in July 2025); and
- The status of the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2025 and the significance of the amendments contained therein.

The DHLGH also noted the commencement of the review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies by the Regional Assemblies.

In the context of on-going research, it was noted that the DHLGH has a joint research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). One of the outputs from this programme was the publication of a research report in 2024 on the ‘Effects of New Residential Developments on Local Healthcare Demand and Workforce: Evidence from Primary and Acute Public Hospital Care in Ireland’. The DHLGH confirmed that Phase 2 of this research, which focuses on healthcare services at a more localised level, is nearing completion. The final report will be shared with the group in due course.

The Chair thanked the DHLGH for the update. The following items were discussed:

- National Planning Statements and their prioritisation;
- The on-going work being undertaken by the DHLGH, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in relation to the standardisation of data collection relating to planning permissions;
- The sequencing of RSEs and the preparation of the new 10-year development plans under the Planning and Development Act 2024; and
- Monitoring of implementation of statutory plans (including environmental monitoring).

In the context of these discussions, the EPA noted the following:

- The health component of land-use planning is examined in the EPA’s research project on Consistent and Proportionate Consideration of Health in Strategic Environmental Assessment (Pro-Health SEA). A toolkit has been published on the EPA’s website on foot of this research and a workshop will be rolled out over the coming months;
- Ireland is due to ratify the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which will impose a requirement that where environment is specified in SEA Regulations, health will need to be addressed

- in the SEA process in this context also; and
- The EPA's SEA and Environmental Monitoring Guidance will be updated within the next 12-15 months.

(iii) Brief Update from the OPR on Research Output

The OPR provided an update on projects being progressed in accordance with the Strategic Planning Research Programme 2023-2025, including:

- The Public Realm Multi-media Project.
- Practice Note PN06 on Development Plan Monitoring.
- Case Study Paper CSP08 on Best Practice in Integrating Green Infrastructure, Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem Services into the Preparation of Land Use Plans.
- A joint paper, being prepared in conjunction with Sport Ireland, on 'Active Recreation Land, Sports Pitches and the Local Authority Development Plan'.

The OPR provided an overview of the new Strategic Planning Research Programme for the period 2026-2028 and noted the following:

- **Strand One – Planning Issues** – Preliminary engagement, project scoping and brief development is ongoing for three of the projects listed in this strand namely: Community and Social Infrastructure Data Coordination for Spatial Planning; Cost Benefit Analysis of Urban Greening Measures and Cost-Comparison with Traditional Construction Costs; and Rural Housing and Ageing Population: Strategic Implications
- **Strand Two – Planning Performance** – Preliminary work is scheduled to commence or programmed for later in 2026 in respect of three of the projects including: Community and Social Infrastructure Case Studies and Spatial Planning (Case Study Paper); Planning for Sustainable Housing Needs of Island Communities; and Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Further Reform of the Planning System versus the Cost of Resourcing the Current Planning System.
- **Strand Three – Planning Practice** – Work has been advanced or is proposed over the coming months for the following projects: Review and Update of Practice Note (PN01) on Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management; Review and Update of Practice Note (PN02) on Environmental Impact Assessment Screening; the EPA's project on AI Supported: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping and Improving Effectiveness; the EPA's Landscape Sensitivity in Assessment of Strategic Plans and Programmes; and the Case Study Paper on Material Contraventions.

The OPR also confirmed its commitment to:

- advancing work in 2027, where possible, on more complex multidisciplinary and legislation contingent project themes;
- aligning projects with relevant partners' work programmes; and
- monitoring and responding to other areas where research is required.

The group welcomed the progress under the various research headings and the following items were discussed/noted:

- The sequencing and publication of research output;
- The recent updates by the European Commission of their Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects - Guidance on Screening, Guidance on Scoping, and Guidance on the Preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report; and
- The synergies between EIA and SEA Screening and the EPA's Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening.

ITEM 3 – TRAINING AND AWARENESS UPDATE

The OPR provided an overview of the work that has been undertaken since the last meeting of the NPKG and the work proposed for the coming months including:

- In-person training for local authority and regional assembly staff on Part 4 (Development Consents) of

- the Planning and Development Act 2024 – nine events were delivered in five locations in Q1 2026;
- Online training for local authority elected members on Part 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (dealing with plans, policies and related matters) delivered on 27 March 2026;
 - Online training for local authority, regional assembly and An Coimisiún Pleanála staff on ‘Electricity Infrastructure: The Challenges and Opportunities’ delivered on 13 March 2026;
 - Online training for local authority, regional assembly and An Coimisiún Pleanála staff on ‘Infrastructure Planning and Delivery to Support New Development Areas’ scheduled for 22 May 2026;
 - In-person training for elected members scheduled for 18 and 20 June in Athlone and Waterford respectively on the ‘Practical Implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024’;
 - The agreement of the Terms of Reference for the review of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy and the ongoing rollout of the Planning Fundamentals training;
 - The publication of Issue 11 of the ‘Legal Digest: Learning from Litigation bulletin’ on 31 March 2026 and the commencement of work on Issue 12 with a view to publication of this edition in June 2026;
 - The ongoing promotion of planning as a career of choice via the OPR’s LinkedIn account and the CareersPortal website; and
 - The OPR’s role in chairing working group one established under the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources. The aim of this group is to expand uptake of existing professional planning training courses. The main action is to design and deliver promotional and awareness measures. To this end the OPR is currently completing a tender process with a view to appointing a contractor to undertake benchmark research to inform the future promotional campaign.

The extensive programme of training and awareness work, being undertaken by the OPR, was welcomed by the Group.

ITEM 4– OPEN DISCUSSION

The ICLRD mentioned its upcoming 20th Anniversary conference which is scheduled to take place in Dundalk on 21 May and invited members of the Group to attend the conference. The theme is ‘Planning the Future: People, Place, Process, Possibilities – The Next Twenty Years’. Further details will be circulated to the NPKG via email.

The OPR highlighted the fact that the EPA’s research call for 2026 is open and some of the research projects may be of interest to the group. Further details will be circulated via email.

ITEM 5 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No items were raised under this heading.

CONCLUSION

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on 7 October 2026 at 11am.