

**MINUTES OF NATIONAL PLANNING KNOWLEDGE GROUP MEETING
HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2025 AT 11.00AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Niall Cussen, Chair
Dr Berna Grist, Vice-Chair
Neale Blair, Ulster University
Noel Cahill, NESC
Erika Casey, An Bord Pleanála

Gerard Crowley, RTPI
Deirdre French, Environmental Protection Agency
Seán O’Leary, Irish Planning Institute
Karen Ray, University College Cork
Deirdre Scully, County and City Management Assoc.

APOLOGIES:

Philip Boland, Queens University Belfast
Shane Burke, Housing Agency
Caroline Creamer, Maynooth University
Justin Gleeson, Maynooth University
Liam Kenny, AILG
Niamh Lennon, MARA

Tommy Moylan, AILG
David O’Connor, Technological University Dublin
Bernie O’Donoghue Hynes, LGMA
Cian O’Mahony, Environmental Protection Agency
Aidan Sweeney, Ibec
Alma Walsh, DHLGH

IN ATTENDANCE

On behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Seán Carpenter, Laura Courtney, Colin Fulcher, Danny O’Sullivan and Aoibheann Nevin

On behalf of Ulster University

Michael Callaghan and Tiernan FitzLarkin

From the Office of the Planning Regulator

Caren Gallagher
Sinéad Mullen
Mary Murphy
John Keating

Eugenia Thompson
Louise Bunyan
Ciara O’Connor

INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

THE 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 2 OCTOBER 2024

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 TO NPKG TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES TO SURVEY

The OPR provided an overview of the updates proposed to the NPKG’s Terms of Reference.

It was noted that the updated Terms of Reference will be circulated to the NPKG after the meeting and will be further updated when relevant sections of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (the 2024 Act) are commenced and the OPR’s Strategy Statement is updated.

The OPR provided a summary of the NPKG survey responses, which included two themes – the advisory contribution which can be made by participants and the value of the discussion opportunities at meetings. It was noted that the feedback will inform the form and function of the NPKG meetings and the ongoing work of the group.

ITEM 3 – UPDATE ON RESEARCH PROJECTS AND OTHER RELATED WORK

(i) Update from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHGLH)

The DHGLH provided an update on:

- various research projects commissioned by the DHGLH;
- the expected timeline for the adoption of the Revised National Planning Framework (NPF) and publication of revised ‘Housing for All’ housing targets;
- the requirement for a National Planning Statement to explain how to integrate these targets regionally and locally; and
- the timeline for commencement of Part 3 of the 2024 Act.

In the context of the 2024 Act, the DHGLH noted the progress that has been made since the enactment of the legislation in October 2024 and confirmed the following:

- The establishment of the Implementation Oversight Group;
- The intention to establish a number of sectoral and thematic implementation working groups;
- The preparation of a comprehensive implementation plan;
- The intention to launch a dedicated webpage to provide details on the rollout of the 2024 Act and the revised new Planning Regulations; and
- Circulars will be issued in advance of the commencement of any part of the 2024 Act.

In the context of the commencement of Chapter 5 of Part 3 of the 2024 Act a detailed discussion took place in relation to the need for guidance to assist local authorities when commencing reviews of city and county development plans to ensure a standardised approach to preparing the strategies contained therein.

(ii) Update from Ulster University on Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Planning Education

The Ulster University representatives delivered presentations on Generative AI in Planning Education.

A discussion ensued regarding the guidance that exists relating to the use of AI in the public sector and policies that have been adopted by different agencies and Departments. The use of AI by the private sector and the general public was also discussed in the context of submissions on development plans and objections/appeals relating to planning applications.

The work of CeADAR, Ireland’s national research centre for AI, was also highlighted.

(iii) Update from the OPR on Research Output

The OPR gave an update on projects being progressed in accordance with the Strategic Planning Research Programme including:

- the Case Study Paper 07 on Quarries and the Local Authority Development Plan, and
- the proposed Practice Note on Development Plan Monitoring.

It was noted that the following research projects are at scoping stage:

- a Case Study Paper on the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP),
- a project with a marine spatial planning theme, and
- a project on the public realm and transport.

The IPI confirmed that they would be happy to assist with the Practice Note on Development Plan Monitoring.

ITEM 4 – TRAINING AND AWARENESS UPDATE

The OPR gave an overview of the training and awareness work that is being undertaken Including:

- the planning training events proposed for local authority and regional assembly elected members and staff in 2025;
- the progress achieved on the rollout of the Planning Fundamentals training provided for under the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy;
- the intention to publish the seventh issue of the ‘Learning from Litigation’ bulletin in March; and
- the initiatives being taken to actively promote planning as a career of choice on the OPR’s social media account.

ITEM 5 - OPEN DISCUSSION

The IPI highlighted upcoming events including:

- a CPD webinar on Vernacular Architecture planned for 7th of February; and
- the 50th anniversary conference in Galway on 10th and 11th April.

UCC noted that their planning conference is scheduled to take place on 13th March. The theme is transformations in marine and coastal planning.

The EPA confirmed the following:

- the pilot UCD two-day course on Strategic Environmental Assessment, originally delivered in December 2024, will be re-run in 2025 on dates to be confirmed;
- SEA integration guidance was recently published on the EPA website;
- the Prohealth and FORSEA projects are ongoing; and
- the SEAWAY project has been finalised and associated guidance has been published on the EPA’s website.

NESC confirmed that a report will be published shortly on compact growth.

ITEM 6 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Vice-Chair expressed her thanks to the team from Ulster University for their presentation on Generative AI.

The OPR highlighted the launch by the All-Island Research Observatory at Maynooth University of a new visual mapping tool, the National Census Atlas, which gives details of emerging economic and social trends across the country.

CONCLUSION

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on 14 May 2025 at 11am.