

**MINUTES OF NATIONAL PLANNING KNOWLEDGE GROUP MEETING
HELD ON 1 OCTOBER 2025 AT 11.00AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Dr Berna Grist, Vice-Chair
Philip Boland, Queens University Belfast
Noel Cahill, NESI
Caroline Creamer, Maynooth University
Gerard Crowley, RTPI
Deirdre French, Environmental Protection Agency
Justin Gleeson, Maynooth University

Karen Hamilton, An Coimisiún Pleanála
Niamh Lennon, MARA
David O'Connor, Technological University Dublin
Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes, LGMA
Eoin O'Neill, University College Dublin
Aidan Sweeney, IBEC
Emer Úi Fhátharta, Dublin City Council

APOLOGIES:

Niall Cussen, Chair
Neale Blair, Ulster University
Shane Burke, Housing Agency
Erika Casey, An Coimisiún Pleanála

Tommy Moylan, AILG
Seán O'Leary, Irish Planning Institute
Karen Ray, University College Cork
Alma Walsh, DHLGH

IN ATTENDANCE

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

From the Office of the Planning Regulator

Caren Gallagher
Sinéad Mullen
Mary Murphy
John Keating

Eugenia Thompson
Aoife O'Sullivan
Edward Lawlor

INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

OPENING ADDRESS

As the Chair of the Group was not available to attend the meeting and sent his apologies, the Vice-Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

AGENDA

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

ITEM 1 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 MAY 2025

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 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

The DHLGH provided an overview of the Section 28 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on “*NPF Implementation and Housing Growth Requirements*”, published on 29 July 2025.

A discussion took place on the implementation of the guidelines which require planning authorities to review and, where necessary, to vary their development plans to meet the new housing growth requirements.

The process and timeframe for planning authorities to commence a variation process was discussed together with the resource constraints in the sector.

(ii) 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:

- Practice Note 06 on Development Plan Monitoring;
- Case Study Paper 08 on Best Practice in Integrating Green Infrastructure, Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem Services into the Preparation of Land Use Plans;
- Ongoing research with external stakeholders; and
- Public Realm Research.

It was noted that one of the outputs from the OPR research on public realm is a short video describing the Athlone public realm improvements project. This video was produced in collaboration with Westmeath County Council. The video was shared with the NPKG and was positively received. The video is available on the OPR's website.

ITEM 3 – STRATEGIC PLANNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME REVIEW

The OPR noted that work is ongoing on the development of a new strategic planning research programme for the period 2026-2028.

The OPR confirmed that the emerging themes are:

- Housing and land activation;
- Rural planning, islands and Gaeltachts;
- Planning for social and community infrastructure;
- Marine spatial planning;
- Climate and environment; and
- Heritage, towns, villages and Town Centre First.

The Group welcomed the emerging themes. Additional areas discussed included *inter alia* renewable energy, sustainable development, active travel, and AI in planning.

It was suggested that research on social and community infrastructure in both urban and rural areas would also be timely given the focus on delivering housing at scale and ensuring that communities are sustainable into the future. The work of the Town Centre First Office was also highlighted together with its relevance in the context of future research.

It was also noted that Maynooth University are working on two relevant research projects namely:

- The development of a Data Insights Hub for Údarás na Gaeltachta which is due to launch shortly. This would be relevant to any project being undertaken linked to Gaeltacht areas.
- The development of a new land monitoring tool in conjunction with the European Space Agency using Copernicus data and working in partnership with Kildare County Council.

The DHLGH confirmed that they would follow up with the OPR in relation to potential research areas following further internal discussion within the Planning Division.

The OPR noted that in the context of AI in planning the working group on innovation and efficiency, that was established under the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, is considering the matter and will report shortly.

The OPR confirmed that they would welcome further suggestions from members of the Group in relation to topics to be covered in the new Strategic Planning Research Programme. Ideally these suggestions would be submitted to the OPR in advance of the February NPKG meeting. The identification of potential opportunities for collaboration would also be welcome.

ITEM 4 – TRAINING AND AWARENESS UPDATE

The OPR provided an overview of the training and awareness work that is being undertaken including:

- Planning training webinars that were delivered in May and June for local authority elected members and staff respectively;
- Upcoming in-person training for local authority and regional assembly staff on Part 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 which will be delivered in Q4 2025 in conjunction with the DHLGH and the County and City Management Association (CCMA);
- A proposed training webinar for local authority and regional assembly staff in November on the Athlone Public Realm Improvements;
- Progress achieved on the implementation of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy including the ongoing rollout of the Planning Fundamentals training and the development and delivery of further training for middle to senior management;
- The publication of issues 8 and 9 of the OPR Legal Digest: Learning from Litigation bulletin in June and September respectively and the proposed publication of Issue 10 in December;
- Supporting An Coimisiún Pleanála with their Autumn Training Series; and
- The development of the OPR's 2026 training programme.

ITEM 5 – PROPOSED 2026 MEETING DATES

It was proposed that three meetings of the NPKG would be held in 2026. The dates proposed were:

- 4 February,
- 6 May, and
- 7 October.

Members of the NPKG were requested to revert to the OPR by 10 October 2025 if they had issues with the dates proposed.

ITEM 7 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No items were raised under this heading.

CONCLUSION

The Vice-Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on 4 February 2026 at 11am.