

**MINUTES OF NATIONAL PLANNING KNOWLEDGE GROUP MEETING
HELD ON 4 FEBRUARY 2026 AT 11.00AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Niall Cussen, Chair

Dr Berna Grist, Vice-Chair

Shane Burke, Housing Agency

Noel Cahill, NESC

Erika Casey, An Coimisiún Pleanála

Caroline Creamer, Maynooth University

David Duffy, Land Development Agency

Deirdre French, Environmental Protection Agency

Justin Gleeson, Maynooth University

Susan Mahon, MARA

Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes, LGMA

David O'Connor, Technological University Dublin

Seán O'Leary, Irish Planning Institute

Eoin O'Neill, University College Dublin

Gavan Rafferty, Ulster University

Aidan Sweeney, Ibec

Alma Walsh, DHLGH

PART-TIME ATTENDANCE:

Philip Boland, Queens University Belfast

Emer Uí Fhátharta, County and City Management Assoc.

Karen Ray, University College Cork

APOLOGIES:

Gerard Crowley, RTPI

Niamh Lennon, MARA

Tommy Moylan, AILG

IN ATTENDANCE

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

Anne Marie Gavin, Lara Shiels

From the Office of the Planning Regulator

Caren Gallagher

Sinéad Mullen

Mary Murphy

John Keating

Aoife O'Sullivan

Edward Lawlor

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 1 OCTOBER 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 – ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UPDATE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR NPKG

It was noted that the Terms of Reference for the NPKG had been updated to reflect the fact that Part 18 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 had commenced. The updated Terms of Reference were circulated to the

Group in advance of the meeting and are available on the OPR website.

ITEM 3 – UPDATE ON RESEARCH PROJECTS AND OTHER RELATED WORK

(i) Update from the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on the Central Data Unit

The LGMA delivered a detailed presentation which gave an overview of:

- The function, purpose and funding of the LGMA and how the agency engages with local authorities via the County and City Management Association (CCMA).
- The various policy committees established by the CCMA and the data working groups, established by the LGMA, to report to these committees.
- How these data working groups collect administrative data from local authorities and create dashboards to visualise the data collected to create a national picture.
- The dedicated planning permission dashboard (which contains details of applications received and where planning permission was granted or refused).

The LGMA highlighted challenges encountered in gathering the planning permission dashboard data including:

- The existence of two separate IT planning systems (iPlan and APAS) which were designed to process applications rather than to produce data.
- Local authorities then have local versions of these IT systems so there are different fields which lead to difficulties in accessing data.

The LGMA confirmed the following:

- Work is ongoing with local authorities and their IT teams and software developers to standardise reports and data collection.
- Engagement is taking place with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to improve efficiencies in the data currently gathered.
- Discussions are taking place with the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage in relation to the data which they collect annually.
- All this work is contributing to the development of the new National Planning IT System.

The Chair thanked the LGMA for the presentation. A brief discussion ensued about the accessibility of the data that is being collected and the potential for it to be made more widely available in the future.

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

The DHLGH provided an update on:

- The implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024.
- The publication of the General Scheme of Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2025.

The DHLGH acknowledged the in-person training that is currently being delivered by the OPR, in conjunction with the CCMA and the DHLGH, for local authority and regional assembly staff, on the Planning and Development Act 2024.

The DHLGH also acknowledged the work that is being undertaken by local authorities to review and, where necessary, to vary their development plans to align with the revised National Planning Framework (NPF) and the revised housing growth requirements as set out in the Section 28 guidelines issued in July 2025. The DHLGH acknowledged the OPR's work in supporting the variations.

The Chair thanked the DHLGH for the update.

(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, 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.

The OPR noted that work has also commenced on a new research project dealing with 'Active Recreation Land, Sports Pitches and Local Authority Development Plans'. This research is being conducted in conjunction with Sport Ireland.

Other research collaborations that are currently active include:

- 'TEACH' Trade-off Evaluation and Assessment of Compact Housing Developments (this is in conjunction with Trinity College Dublin and the Housing Agency).
- Guidance for Local Authorities on Management of Coastal Erosion and Coastal Change (this is being produced in conjunction with the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)).

The group complimented the OPR on the research that is being undertaken and welcomed the publication of the research on legal costs in planning and environmental judicial reviews, completion of the REMARC Report to which the OPR contributed, and the commencement of work on the active recreation land and the provision of sports pitches.

ITEM 4 – STRATEGIC PLANNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR 2026-2028

The OPR provided an update on the proposed new Strategic Planning Research Programme (SPRP) for the period 2026-2028 and noted that the SPRP is being developed in accordance with the OPR's Planning Research Framework.

The emerging themes under the respective strands were noted as follows:

Strand One – Planning Issues

Phase 1

- Community and Social Infrastructure Data Coordination for Spatial Planning.
- Rural Housing and Ageing Population: Strategic Implications.

Phase 2

- Common Good/Public Engagement/Youth Engagement and Acceptance of Planning and Environmental Policy.
- Ethically Informed Approaches to AI in Planning.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis of Urban Greening Measures and Cost Comparison with Traditional Construction Costs.

Strand Two – Planning Performance

Phase 1

- Community and Social Infrastructure Data Coordination for Spatial Planning (Case Study Paper).
- Planning for Sustainable Housing Needs of Island Communities.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Further Reform of the Planning System versus the Cost of Resourcing the Current Planning System.

Phase 2

- Best Practice in Section 254 Licensing.
- Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) Best Practice Case Studies.

Strand Three – Planning Practice

Phase 1

- 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
- AI Supported: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping and Improving Effectiveness (Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Project)
- Landscape Sensitivity in Assessment of Strategic Plans and Programmes (EPA Project)
- Exploring Material Contraventions

Phase 2

- Review and Update Practice Note (PN03) on Planning Conditions
- Review and Update Practice Note (PN05) on Planning Enforcement
- Appropriate Assessment Screening in the Nearshore Area
- Implications and Implementation of Planning Policy for Re-use/Refurbishment and Demolition.

The OPR also confirmed its commitment to ongoing monitoring and responding to areas in need of research.

The Group welcomed the work proposed in the new research programme.

ITEM 5 – TRAINING AND AWARENESS UPDATE

The OPR noted the recent commencement of Section 549 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 and the reinforcement of the OPR's statutory obligation to conduct education and training programmes for elected members and staff of local authorities and regional assemblies and the extension of this work to include training programmes for members and staff of An Coimisiún Pleanála.

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

- Online training for local authority elected members on 'Electricity Transmission and Distribution' delivered on 27 January 2026.
- The development of a training programme for elected members in 2026 with topics potentially including: the Planning and Development Act 2024, Infrastructure Planning and Delivery, Town Centre First Plans and Statutory Plans, Housing Agency Briefing, Development Plan Policy, etc.
- The development of a training programme for local authority and regional assembly staff for 2026 with a strong focus on infrastructure planning and delivery.
- The rollout of in-person training for Senior Management in the local authority sector on the Planning and Development Act 2024. Package 1 on Part 3 (Plans, Policies and Related Matters was delivered across nine days in Q4 2025) and Package 2 on Part 4 (Development Consents) is being delivered across nine days in Q1 2026.
- A review of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy (2022) in conjunction with the CCMA, the DHLGH and the Local Authority Services National Training Group.
- The OPR's representation on the Consortium Steering Group on Planner Apprenticeships and the development of the apprenticeship programme in conjunction with the coordinating provider.
- The publication of Issue 10 of the 'Legal Digest: Learning from Litigation' bulletin in December 2025 and the intention to publish Issue 11 in March 2026.
- The on-going promotion of planning as a career of choice via the OPR's LinkedIn account and the CareersPortal website.

The DHLGH welcomed the training and public awareness work being undertaken by the OPR and highlighted the action contained in the 'Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan' for the OPR to continue to provide training and guidance to drive best practice and consistency across local planning decisions.

ITEM 6 – OPEN DISCUSSION

Maynooth University confirmed that, in recognition of Ireland holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2026, there will be a special European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) week commencing on 9 November which will include an international planning conference on the 11 and 12 November in City Hall in Cork.

NESC highlighted the upcoming Annual Conference of the Regional Studies Association which is scheduled to take place in University College Cork on 20 February 2026. The theme of the conference is 'Compact Growth'.

The Irish Planning Institute (IPI) noted the following:

- The IPI's Annual Conference will take place on 16 and 17 April in Athlone.
- Justin Gleeson from Maynooth University and Director of the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) features in the most recent IPI podcast.
- Entries are open for the IPI's Student Awards.
- The latest edition of the IPI journal - Pleanáil is now available.
- The new IPI Policy Committee is preparing a position note on Artificial Intelligence.

ITEM 7 – 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 6 May 2026 at 11am.