



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

Office of the Planning Regulator

Activity Report

Quarter 3 of 2025



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Introduction

This is the twenty-second of a series of quarterly activity reports (QARs) that the Office of the Planning Regulator (the OPR) publishes as an overview of the nature and extent of its functions across its statutory mandate.

These are:

- I. Evaluation of the statutory plans of the local government system;
- II. Reviews and examinations of local authority systems and procedures used in the delivery of planning services to the public; and
- III. Undertaking programmes relating to training, education, research and public awareness in relation to the benefits of planning.

Evaluation of Statutory Plans

The OPR is responsible for independently assessing city/county development plans (CDPs) and local area plans (LAPs) at three key stages: issues paper, draft plan and material alterations. The OPR also considers any proposed variations to existing CDPs or amendments to LAPs. OPR submissions may include recommendations, observations or advice.

In Q3 2025, 16 consultations on statutory plans opened for public consultation. These consultations related to:

- two issues paper to CDPs;
- 11 draft variations to existing CDPs;
- one material alterations to a draft variation to existing CDP;
- one issues paper to an Urban Area Plan; and
- one material alterations to a draft LAP.

OPR Submissions on Statutory Plans

In Q3 2025, the OPR made 11 submissions to local authorities. Table 1 below sets out a breakdown by plan-type. In Q3 the majority of submissions related to variations to existing CDPs at draft stage.

Submissions on Statutory Plans	
Draft Variations to CDPs: - Variation No. 2 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 - Variation No. 2 to the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 - Variation No. 1 to the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Variation No. 6 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Variation No. 3 to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Variation No. 1 to the Monaghan County Development Plan 2025-2031 - Variation No. 1 of the Waterford City and County Development Plan 2022-2028 - Variation No. 1 to the South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028	8
Material Alterations to Variations to CDPs: Material Alteration to Variation No. 1 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028	1
Issues Papers for Urban Area Plans: Issues Paper for the Sligo Town and Environs Urban Area Plan	1
Material Alterations to LAPs: Material Alterations to the draft Old Connaught Local Area Plan 2025	1
Total:	11

Table 1 | Submissions on Statutory Plans

OPR Submissions by Regional Area

Local authorities are divided into three regional areas, represented by three regional assemblies:

- The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA);
- The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA); and
- The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA).

OPR submissions during Q3 2025 related to all regional assembly areas. Figure 1 below shows the number of submissions made on consultations within each regional assembly area.

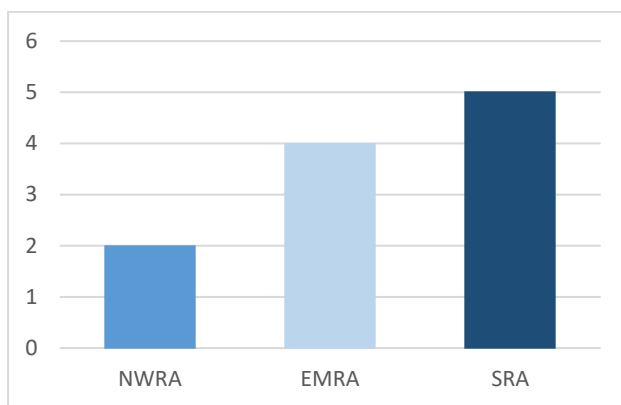


Figure 1 | OPR Submissions by Regional Assembly Area

OPR Recommendations and Observations

The OPR may make recommendations or observations in its submissions at the draft and/or material alterations stage. Due to the high-level nature of issues papers, the OPR does not make observations or recommendations at this stage.

Recommendations issued by the OPR relate to clear breaches of relevant legislative provisions; the national or regional policy framework; and Government policy, as set out in the Ministerial Guidelines under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act). The local authority is requested to implement or address recommendation(s) made by the OPR.

Observations take the form of a request for further information, justification on a particular matter, or clarification regarding particular provisions of a plan on issues that are required to ensure alignment with policy and legislative provisions. The OPR advises local authorities to action an observation.

Table 2 below sets out the number of observations and recommendations made by the OPR in Q3 2025.¹

	Submissions (number):	Recommendations (number):	Observations (number):
Draft Variations to CDPs	8	18	5
Material Alterations to Variations to CDPs	1	1	0
Material Alterations to Draft LAPs	1	0	2
Total:	10	19	7

Table 2 | Recommendations and Observations made by the OPR

OPR Recommendations and Observations: Legislative Categories

The evaluation and assessment of plans considers the following legislative and policy matters:

- Consistency with the National Planning Framework (NPF);
- Consistency with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES);
- Consistency with the relevant Development Plan (DP);
- Relevant guidelines for planning authorities made under Section 28 of Act, including consistency with specific planning policy requirements (SPPR) specified in those guidelines;
- Consistency with the National Transport Authority (NTA) Transport Strategy (TS) (if in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA));
- Consistency with the legislative provisions for statutory plans as provided for under the Act; and
- Consistency with legislative provisions in relation to Climate Action.

¹ As the OPR does not issue recommendations or observations at issues paper stage these figures do not relate to submissions made at issues paper stage.

A breakdown of the recommendations and observations made in Q3 by legislative category is contained in Tables 3 and 4 below. As recommendations can cover more than one legislative provision, the numbers presented in these tables (Table 3 and 4) differ from the total number of recommendations listed above in Table 2 above.

OPR Recommendations	Number
Consistency with NPF	19
Consistency with RSES	11
Consistency with DP	4
Consistency with NTA TS for GDA	0
Policy Matters re Section 28 Guidelines	3
Consistency with Legislative Provisions	0
Consistency with Legislative Provisions re Climate Change	0
Other	1
Total:	38

Table 3 | OPR Recommendations

OPR Observations	Number
Consistency with NPF	2
Consistency with RSES	2
Consistency with DP	3
Consistency with NTA TS for GDA	0
Policy Matters re Section 28 Guidelines	3
Consistency with Legislative Provisions	0
Consistency with Legislative Provisions re Climate Change	0
Other	1
Total:	11

Table 4 | OPR Observations

Adopted Plans: Outcome of OPR Submissions

Once a plan has been adopted, the OPR has four weeks to assess the plan as adopted and determine whether the plan aligns with national and regional policy and has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made by the OPR. A total of four plans were adopted in Q3 2025.

Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031 was adopted by planning authority in Q3 2025. The Office made five recommendations in total at the draft stage and material alterations stage of this plan. The recommendations were satisfactorily addressed for the plan.

In addition, three variations to existing CDPs were made in Q3: Variation No. 4 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, Variation No. 2 to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 and Variation No. 1 Kerry County Development Plan 2021-2027. The OPR completed its assessment of all three. The OPR made eight recommendations to the proposed variations which were satisfactorily addressed.

Also, in Q3 the OPR completed its assessment of one variation to existing CDPs and two LAPs which were adopted in Q2 2025:

- Variation No. 3 to Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028;
- Blessington Local Area Plan 2025-2031; and
- Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan 2025-2031.

The recommendations were satisfactorily addressed with no further action required

Draft Directions

Further to Section 31AM of the Act, where the OPR is of the opinion that a plan has been made in a way that is not consistent with any recommendations made by the OPR and that the plan has been made in a manner which fails to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned, the OPR may deem that it is merited for the Minister to issue a direction.

The OPR did not issue any recommendations to the Minister of draft directions in Q3 2025. The Minister issued a draft Direction on the Monaghan County Development Plan 2025-2031 in Q3 following a recommendation from the OPR issued in June 2025.

Final Directions

The OPR issued a recommendation to the Minister of a final Direction on three plans in Q3 2025: the Monaghan County Development Plan 2025-2031, Variation No. 2 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 and Wicklow Town and Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025-2031. The direction process was ongoing for these plans at the end of Q3 2025.

Note: *The OPR's submissions and recommendations to the Minister can be found on the [OPR's website](#). Please note that final Directions are only published once the Direction process has been complete.*

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement with Local Authorities

During Q3 2025, the OPR continued to engage with local authorities, meeting with:

- Kerry County Council;
- Roscommon County Council;
- Wexford County Council;
- Donegal County Council; and
- Kilkenny County Council.

This engagement allows the OPR to answer queries or discuss key matters regarding proposed plans, and to provide additional information, such as policy updates, which may support the work of the local authority during the plan-making process.

Plans Evaluation Forum

The OPR did not host Plans Evaluation Forum in Q3 2025.

Reviews and Examinations

OPR Planning Reviews

Under Section 31AS and 31AT of the Act the OPR is empowered to conduct reviews of the systems and procedures used by local authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála to deliver planning functions. In this regard the Office fulfils an important oversight and monitoring role in relation to the overall delivery of planning services to the public.

The undertaking of any individual review process is comprehensive, involving significant processes of information gathering, analysis and engagement between the OPR and planning officials, which take several months to complete to fully appraise the systems and procedures used to deliver planning functions. Following the completion of each review the OPR continues to engage with the relevant authority (or An Coimisiún Pleanála) for a period of at least two years to monitor and support the successful implementation of the review recommendations.

The OPR conducts local authority planning reviews as a rolling programme. While authorities reviewed benefit individually (in terms of operational insights and recommendations made to strengthen practice and procedure), at an overall level the intention of the programme is to embed a culture of continuous improvement in the Irish planning sector.

Review of Galway County Council

Following an intensive schedule of workshop meetings earlier in the summer, work on the review continued through the analysis of extensive material and data, as well as initial preparation of the draft review report. It is expected that the draft report will be circulated to the Council in Q4.

Review of Longford County Council

As above, the OPR also continued its review of Longford County Council with analysis and report writing work progressing.

Local Authority Monitoring

The OPR continues to engage with previously reviewed local authorities in relation to the implementation of OPR recommendations. To that end, in Q3, the Office engaged with the following local authorities in relation to:

County Council	Timeline
Roscommon County Council	6-month progress update
South Dublin County Council	12-month progress update
Offaly County Council	18-month progress update
Waterford City and County Council	12-month progress update

Table 5 | Local Authority Monitoring

Case Handling

Case Activity

The OPR provides a service to the public in relation to a variety of planning-related case types including queries or general information requests, submissions on aspects of the operation of the planning process, and complaints about the delivery of planning services.

During Q3, a total of 78 new cases were received, and 78 cases were closed by the OPR, detailed by month in Figure 2 below. Figure 12.

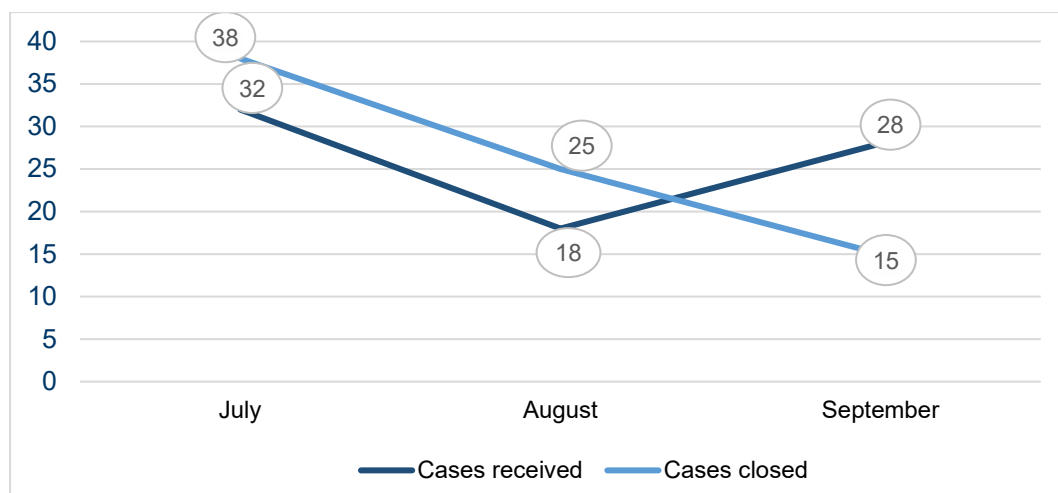


Figure 2 | Cases Received vs. Cases Closed Q3, 2025

The 78 cases closed in Q3 are as follows:

- 35 complaints
- 38 queries
- five submissions

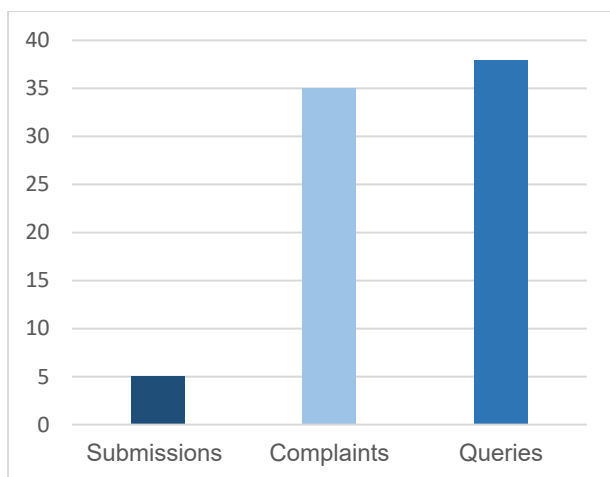


Figure 3 | Case Types

All cases raised with the Office are treated with the utmost regard, irrespective of the category of case type it falls into. It is the OPR's objective to serve as a public resource in relation to the planning system and, in as far as possible, to provide independent guidance in relation to planning policy in Ireland. Accordingly, the same attention is given to issues raised in queries or submissions and matters that are not valid in terms of the Office's statutory remit as may be given to complaints.

It is also worth noting that submissions from members of the public can be very useful in raising issues of overall relevance for the operation of the planning system. One such submission made to the OPR during Q3 identified an error in relation to the consolidated version of the Planning and Development Regulations hosted on the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's website. The formatting error had resulted in an inappropriate condition/limitation appearing in relation to the incorrect planning exemption, with a knock-on result for the processing of exempted development declarations by local authorities. On foot of the submission the Office took action to ensure that the Department corrected the error, preventing further confusion.

While a broad range of themes arose in the OPR's case handling during Q3, several dominant themes prevailed. As can be seen in Figure 4, the most common single theme was individual planning case (occurring in 31% of cases) followed closely by issues associated with enforcement and unauthorised development (at 20%) and statutory plan making (at 11%).

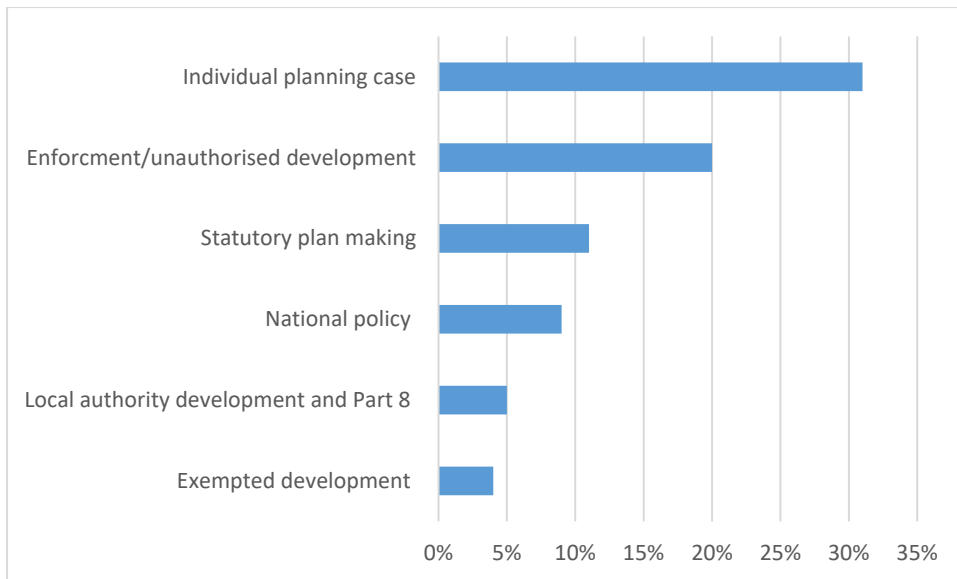


Figure 4 | Distribution of Main Themes of Cases Closed

Complaints

It is important to note that there are other State agencies with responsibility for dealing with certain types of complaints in planning, such as the Ombudsman's Office, the Standards in Public Office Commission and An Coimisiún Pleanála. This means there is a high threshold in law in relation to the types of complaints that fall within the OPR's remit to examine.

For a complaint to be examined by the OPR, it must relate to the organisation of the local authority and of the systems and procedures used by it in the performance of its planning functions. The OPR gave preliminary examination to six of the 35 complaints closed during Q3 as these are in accordance with the legislation. None of these complaints were upheld.

Research, Education, Training and Public Awareness

Local Authority and Regional Assembly Staff Training

In Q3 in line with the OPR's statutory mandate to conduct education and training programmes for staff of local authorities and regional assemblies in respect of matters relating to proper planning and sustainable development, the OPR delivered a bespoke online training event on '*Local Transport Plans and the Statutory Plan-making Process*'

The webinar was delivered in June in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA). The presentations dealt with:

- Local Transport Plans, Lessons Learnt and Revising the Area-based Transport Assessment Methodology; and
- Experience of Local Transport Plan Preparation.

The presentations were delivered by Julie Galbraith, Land Use and Transport Planner with the NTA and John Keating, Senior Planner with the OPR. The presentations were followed by a Q&A session. The presentations and the recording of the webinar are available on the [OPR's website](#).

Planning and Development Act 2024 Training Strategy for the Local Authority Sector

In Q3 the OPR working in conjunction with County and City Management Association (CCMA) and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) prepared and agreed a Planning and Development Act 2024 Training Strategy for the Local Authority Sector (the Strategy). This Strategy was prepared on foot of the [Planning and Development Act 2024 – Implementation Plan](#) published by the DHLGH in March 2025.

The aim of the Strategy is to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (the 2024 Act) by the provision of appropriate and targeted training for appropriate local authority staff.

The Strategy provides for a range of delivery models for the training including in-person training, webinars, publication of planning circulars and updates to the planning leaflet series. Three primary packages of training were identified in the Strategy. Package 1 will deal with Part 3 of the 2024 Act i.e. Plans, Policies and Related Matters. Package 2 will deal with Part 4 of the 2024 Act i.e. Development Management. Package 3 will deal with the Remaining Elements of the 2024 Act.

The Strategy notes that the OPR is responsible for the rollout of the in-person training. On this basis following the approval of the Strategy the OPR prepared and submitted an estimate of costs for the Package 1 training to the DHLGH. This provided for the delivery of training over two days at four regional locations nationwide including Portlaoise, Cork, Waterford and Galway with a sweeper day (a fifth day) to be facilitated in the Greater Dublin Area. The costs were approved by the DHLGH in Q3 and the OPR proceeded to confirm dates and venues as follows.

Day 1 – October 2025

Date	Location
Tuesday, 14 October	Cork
Wednesday, 15 October	Waterford
Monday, 20 October	Portlaoise
Tuesday, 21 October	Galway

Day 2 – November 2025

Date	Location
Tuesday, 11 November	Waterford
Friday, 14 November	Cork
Wednesday, 19 November	Galway
Thursday, 20 November	Portlaoise

The sweeper day was confirmed for 25 November in Malahide, Co. Dublin.

Throughout Q3 the OPR worked extensively with the DHLGH and the CCMA to:

- identify speakers and to work with the speakers to develop training content for the events (including presentations, speaking notes and a legal paper;
- promote the training via the local authority sector;
- register expressions of interest; and
- manage bookings and venues for the events.

At the request of the DHLGH the OPR prepared and submitted an Estimate of Costs for the Package 2 funding in Q3 also. Approval of this funding is still awaited. The OPR has provisionally booked dates and venues for Package 2 and will need to confirm these bookings in Q4 to secure the bookings.

Publication of Educational Material for Local Authority and Regional Assembly Staff and Other Key Stakeholders

During Q3, the OPR hosted a meeting of the Planning Law Bulletin Steering Group and agreed the case selection for the ninth edition of the '*Learning from Litigation*' bulletin. On the recommendation of the Group it was agreed that a new Appeal Watch section would be included in the bulletin. This new section will contain any additional learnings from the Superior Courts in relation to cases dealt with in previous editions of the bulletin. The OPR's legal advisers drafted the case summaries for the ninth edition of the bulletin in conjunction with the OPR. The cases included:

- Donegal County Council v Planree Limited and Mid-Cork Electrical Limited [2024] IECA300;
- Concerned Residents of Coolkill, Sandyford Downs and Lamb's Brook and Aonghus O'Keeffe v An Bord Pleanála [2025] IEHC265;

- Peter Carvill and Mannix Flynn v Dublin City Council, Ireland and the Attorney General [2025] IECA 84; and
- Protect East Meath Limited v An Bord Pleanála [2025] IEHC 276.

In the new Appeal Watch section, the Court of Appeal judgment in respect of a case that was included in the Issue seven of the bulletin was summarised. This judgment related to:

- Friends of the Irish Environment Company Limited by Guarantee and SMTW Environmental Designated Activity Company v the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland and the Attorney General [2025] IECA128.

The ninth edition of the '*Learning from Litigation*' bulletin was published in Q3. This edition was shared with stakeholders and promoted extensively via the OPR's LinkedIn account. The bulletin is published on a quarterly basis and the next edition will be published in December.

Implementation of the Learning and Development Strategy for Local Authority Planning Staff

In Q3 the OPR continued to work with the CCMA, the DHLGH and the Local Authority Services National Training Group's (LASNTG) on the implementation of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy.

Regular meetings were held between the OPR and LASNTG's Secretary and Planning Advisor. The OPR also participated in a meeting of the Planning Services Training Group (PSTG). The PSTG is a pillar under the LASNTG and is responsible for the development and delivery of training courses to meet the training needs of the local government planning services sector. In Q3 the following progress was achieved:

- The courseware content for the four planning fundamental courses was updated, where necessary, to reflect the commencement of various parts of the PDA 2024.
- The rollout of the four planning fundamental courses continued across LASNTG's five regional training centres.
- The planning specific technical report writing course was piloted. The courseware content was updated following the feedback received. The course is being rolled out in Q3 and Q4 2025.

- Expressions of interest were sought from local authorities in respect of the South East Technological University (SETU) – Certificate in Energy Sustainability – Renewable Technology (Level 7 - 10 ECTS). Registrations are now complete and the course is being delivered in Semester 1 (Sept-December 2025).
- The Urban Design Focus Group agreed that the new urban design course will be developed by consultants and overseen by the group. It will be a three-day in-person training course dealing with the foundations of urban design, urban design frameworks and masterplans. It is anticipated that this will be rolled out in 2026.
- Promotion of the LASNTG planning training continued and LASNTG booked an exhibition stand at the IPI Winter Conference on 2 October.

Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources

The Steering Group, established by the DHLGH, to coordinate and oversee the development of a Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources met in April and May. The OPR is a member of the Steering Group. The aim of the Ministerial Action Plan is to increase the pool of planning and related expertise and to bring forward new talent to meet present and future needs. The OPR is responsible for chairing Working Group One on education and co-chairing Working Group Four on innovation and efficiency. Throughout Q3, Working Group One met on two occasions, and a meeting of the Steering Group also took place in early July.

Initial Consortium Steering Group on Planner Apprenticeship Project

The OPR is represented on the Consortium Steering Group (ICSG) on Planner Apprenticeships. This group comprises representatives from the DHLGH, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the CCMA, the LGMA, An Coimisiún Pleanála, the OPR, the Irish Planning Institute and the private sector. The aim of the group is to support the development of a spatial planning apprenticeship. In Q2, the National Apprenticeship Alliance approved the application and throughout Q3, the OPR continued to engage with key stakeholders to progress the apprenticeship including the appointed coordinating provider, TU Dublin.

Stakeholder Engagement

County and City Management Association Planning and Land Use Committee Meeting

In Q3 the OPR was invited to deliver a presentation to the Planning and Land Use Committee of the CCMA on the Planning and Development Act 2024 Training Strategy for the Local Authority Sector and the upcoming in-person training events. This presentation was delivered at the plenary of the CCMA's Planning and Land Use Committee in Westport in mid-September.

OPR Research Output

During Q3 the OPR advanced work on a number of research projects identified within the Strategic Planning Research Programme (2023-2025) some of which were long-term projects carried over from the original Strategic Planning Research Programme (2020-2022).

Strand One (Planning Issues) Projects

During Q3 the OPR advanced work on the Public Realm Developments research project. The aim of this project is to highlight and promote the work that is being undertaken by local authorities to enhance the public realm in towns and cities. Following engagement with Westmeath County Council, it was agreed that the public realm project would focus initially on the public realm improvements completed in Athlone. The OPR working in conjunction with Westmeath County Council prepared a promotional video in Q3 to showcase the Athlone public realm improvements. The OPR is currently working on preparing a webpage to promote the video on its website and to highlight how Westmeath County Council approached the public realm improvements. This webpage will be available in Q4 and will seek to share the lessons learnt with the wider local authority sector.

Strand Two (Planning Performance) Projects

During Q3, the OPR continued to participate in the Steering Committee for two EPA projects;

- Pro-Health SEA which examines Proportionate and Consistent Consideration of Population and Human Health in SEA; and
- REMARC, which seeks to identify pathways towards higher rates of septic tank remediation to safeguard the environment and public health.

In Q3 the OPR undertook reviews of the final research reports and these were signed-off by the Steering Committee. It is anticipated these research reports will be published in Q4 2025.

During Q3 the OPR procured a contractor, MKO Planning and Environmental Consultants, to prepare and draft Case Study Paper CSP08 which will examine best practice on integrating Green Infrastructure, Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem Services into land use plans. This project is scheduled to kick off early in Q4.

Strand Three (Planning Practice) Projects

During Q3 work continued on the preparation of Practice Note PN06 on Development Plan Monitoring. Following the workshop in June, MacCabe Durney Barnes undertook a series of further focused engagement with key stakeholders. This was necessary to inform the development of an indicators database for the practice note. Drafting of the practice note is ongoing and is anticipated that the draft practice note will be finalised in Q4.

Also, during Q3 the OPR, together with the Housing Agency, provided support to Trinity College Dublin in respect of their research bid to Construct Innovate, as funded by the DHLGH. The project referred to as 'TEACH' Trade-off Evaluation and Assessment of Compact Housing developments, was successful in its funding application. The aim of the project is to develop a multi-faceted comparison tool to assess the impacts of housing development on greenfield versus brownfield sites. A workshop will be held in Q4 and it is envisaged the project will be finalised in early 2026.

Finally, as part of stakeholder engagement across various research projects the OPR undertook some preliminary research scoping on the theme of active amenity space and sports policies in development plans. It is hoped to host a workshop on this theme with relevant stakeholders in Q4, this initial research exercise is intended to inform the review of the Strategic Planning Research Programme which will commence in earnest in Q4.

Communications and Digital Analytics

In Q3 the Communications team continued to support the OPR across media, social media and events. Some highlights included:

- To support implementation of the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, the Communications team provided Secretariat to Working Group One Planning Education and were a member of Working Group Two Planning Recruitment.
- The Communications team responded to media queries regarding the work of the OPR. The OPR attended the IPI Conference in October.
- Work continued promoting planning matters and planning as a career of choice, welcoming the inclusion of '*planner*' on the critical skills list.
- The Communications team published their quarterly stakeholder newsletter to 1,705 subscribers, in October.
- The OPR continued our engaging social media calendar promoting events and resources to raise awareness of resources and activities underway. There was a large increase of followers on LinkedIn and a small decrease on X followers during Q3 2025, as outlined below. This aligns with the OPR's prioritisation of LinkedIn as a platform during this period:
 - **LinkedIn:** 4,374 followers. Increase of 180 on last quarter.
 - **X:** 2492 followers. Decrease of 21 on last quarter.



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