Oifig an Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the Planning Regulator

Office of the Planning Regulator

Activity Report

Quarter 3 of 2026



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Introduction

This quarterly activity report (QAR) relates to activities conducted by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) during Quarter 3, 2026.

The OPR publishes this QAR 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.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 was signed into law on 17 October 2024. The Act is being commenced on a phased basis to facilitate a smooth transition from the existing legislation to the new legislation. It is important to note that transitional arrangements are in place. This means that certain elements of the work reflected in this report were undertaken under the previous legislation (2000 Act) and some elements were undertaken under the current legislation (2024 Act).

Information on the commencement of the Planning and Development Act 2024 is available on the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage website.

Planning Policy Implementation

The OPR is responsible for independently assessing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) prepared by regional assemblies and city/county development plans (CDPs), including variations to existing CDPs, and area plans prepared by local authorities. The OPR's assessment of statutory plans occurs at three key stages: issues paper, draft plan and material alterations. OPR submissions may include recommendations, observations or advice[1].

OPR Submissions on Statutory Plans

In Q3 2026, the OPR made 19 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 material alterations stage. Most of these were in response to the publication of the NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines (Housing Growth Guidelines) in July 2025, which requires local authorities to review their development plans and vary it as needed to reflect the updated housing targets set out in the Housing Growth Guidelines.

Submissions on Statutory Plans			
Plan stage	Issues Paper	Draft	Material Alterations
Variations to City/County Development Plans	0	7	11
Urban Area Plans (UAP)	0	1	0
Total:	**0**	**8**	**11**

Table 1 | Submissions on Statutory Plans

[1] Chapter 5 of Part 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2024, which relates to the preparation of development plans and variations by planning authorities and the assessment by the Office, was commenced on 31st December 2025. However, section 69(2) provides that the variation of a development plan under section 13 of the Act of 2000 shall continue under that Act after the repeal of section 13 of the Act of 2000. Therefore, the OPR undertook evaluations and assessments of statutory plans in QX 202X under the Act of 2000 and the Act of 2024.

OPR Submissions by Regional Area

Local authorities are divided into three regional areas, represented by three regional assemblies: EMRA, NWRA and SRA.

OPR submissions on local authority and regional assembly plans during Q3 2026 related to all regional assembly areas. Figure 1 below shows the number of submissions made on consultations within each regional assembly area.

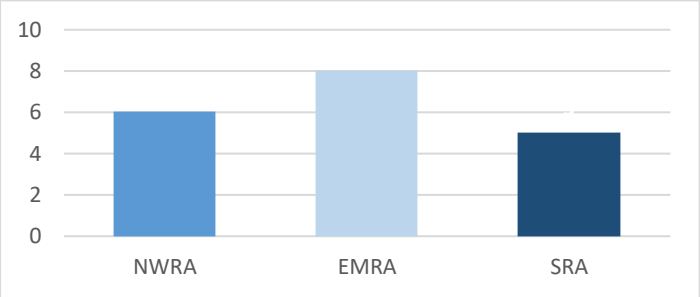


Figure 1 | OPR Submissions by Regional Assembly Area

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 arise where the OPR identifies clear inconsistencies with legislative provisions or policy frameworks and are intended to be addressed to ensure compliance. Observations highlight areas where further clarification, justification, or refinement would strengthen the plan. The submission may also include advice to support the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Table 2 below sets out the number of observations and recommendations made by the OPR in Q3 2026.[2]

Recommendations and Observations Made by the OPR			
	Submissions (number):	**Recommendations (number):**	**Observations (number):**
Draft Variations to CDPs	**7**	**9**	**6**
Material Alterations to Variations to CDPs	**11**	**18**	**8**
Draft UAPs	**1**	**0**	**3**
Total:	**19**	**27**	**17**

Table 2 | Recommendations and Observations made by the OPR

Adopted Plans: Outcome of OPR Submissions

Once a plan is adopted, the OPR assesses it to determine whether it aligns with national and regional policy and has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made by the OPR.

In Q3 2026, a total of 13 plans (all variations) were adopted by local authorities. The OPR's assessment of 12 plans was ongoing at the end of Q3. The assessment of Variation No. 1 to the Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030 is explored further in the section below.

The OPR completed the assessment of 11 variations which were adopted before Q3 with no further action required.

[2] 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.

Suspension of Adopted Development Plans

Under Section 63(6) of the Act of 2024, where the OPR forms a preliminary view that there may be material inconsistency with specific planning policy, the OPR can suspend specific provisions of an adopted plan pending the completion of its assessment.

In Q3 2026, the OPR issued two notices of suspension regarding Variation No. 1 to the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and Variation No. 1 to the Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030. The suspensions will remain in effect until the OPR pending completion of the OPR's assessment.

Draft Directions

Under Section 63(10) of the Act of 2024, where the OPR is of the opinion that a plan has been made in a way that fails to establish an integrated overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the relevant area, is materially inconsistent with planning legislation and/or policy, or departs from the relevant guidance or transport strategy without adequate explanation, the OPR can make a recommendation to the Minister that a draft direction should be issued.

If the Minister agrees with the OPR's recommendation, the OPR issues the draft direction to the planning authority and holds a public consultation on the contents of the draft direction. If the Minister does not agree with the OPR's recommendation, the OPR notifies the planning authority of this decision.

In Q3 2026, the OPR did not issue any recommendations to a local authority on a draft direction.

Final Directions

Following completion of the consultation on draft directions, the OPR considers the submissions received during the consultation period and makes a final recommendation to the Minister, either to issue the direction as set out in the draft direction or in an amended form, or not to issue the direction.

In Q3 2026, the OPR did not make a recommendation to the Minister on a final direction.

Note: *The suspension notices, draft directions and directions can be found on the OPR's website.*

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement with Local Authorities

During Q3 2026, the OPR continued to engage with local authorities, meeting with:

- Donegal County Council
- Fingal County Council
- South Dublin County Council
- Kery County Council
- Kilkenny County Council
- Laois County Council
- Mayo County Council
- Meath County Council
- Monaghan County Council
- Westmeath County Council
- Wexford 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 didn't host a Plans Evaluation Forum in Q3 2026.

Planning Performance

OPR Planning Reviews

Under planning legislation, the OPR is empowered to conduct reviews of the organisation and management of, and the systems and procedures used by local authorities, regional assemblies and An Coimisiún Pleanála to deliver planning functions.

Longford County Council

The OPR published its review of Longford County Council in September. The report considers performance across a range of planning-related functions and makes eight recommendations to help the Council strengthen its planning department's operational resilience, build capacity for service improvement, and support wider strategic objectives.

The report notes that, while Longford had the largest county-level population increase (14%) in the period before the last Census (2016-2022), housing delivery has been a concern over the past decade. The OPR's analysis recognises Longford County Council's potential to strengthen its approach to land activation, address vacancy and dereliction, and capitalise on the county's strategic opportunities to deliver sustainable development, compact growth, and regeneration in line with national policy objectives.

The OPR will continue to work with Longford County Council over the coming period to secure implementation of the review recommendations.

Implementation of recommendations

Following the completion of each review, the OPR continues to engage with the relevant authority for a period of at least two years to monitor and support the successful implementation of the review recommendations. To that end, in Q3 of 2026, the OPR engaged with the following local authorities:

Galway County Council	First progress update
Meath County Council	Third progress update
Roscommon County Council	Third progress update
Waterford City and County Council	Fourth progress update
Offaly County Council	Fourth progress update

Table 3 | Implementation of review recommendations

The OPR's monitoring work highlights the challenges local authorities face in implementing improvements amid resource constraints, recruitment and retention challenges and evolving and emerging legislative demands.

Thematic Review: Planning Enforcement and Peat Extraction

A comprehensive research study related to the overall statutory and regulatory framework relevant to peat extraction has been completed for the OPR by expert consultants. The consultants' analysis and findings will be incorporated with knowledge of the various local authorities' direct experiences of managing peat extraction in the context of their enforcement activities to inform an OPR review report to the Minister. The OPR report is currently being prepared.

OPR Local Authority Planning Supports Programme

Internal Evaluation of OPR Programme of Planning Reviews

With 11 OPR reviews of local authority planning departments conducted since 2022, the OPR conducted an internal evaluation of the programme during Q3.

The internal evaluation outlines that the OPR's programme of planning reviews has delivered significant performance improvement outcomes for planning authorities, including in relation to governance, service delivery, workforce development and organisational capacity.

A strength of the programme has been its collaborative and engagement-focused approach, with structured engagement throughout the process, including workshops, site visits, follow-up meetings and ongoing implementation support. Supporting the implementation of recommendations has been crucial in ensuring that the reviews delivered results.

The evaluation highlighted recurring sectoral challenges as well as examples of effective practice and innovation. Insights from the reviews have informed wider sectoral initiatives, supported shared learning and helped promote greater consistency in planning service delivery. Through the review programme, implementation monitoring, workshops and ongoing engagement with local authorities, the OPR has developed a significant body of evidence and insight into the operation of planning services across the sector.

The recurrence of shared challenges across multiple local authorities indicates that, alongside authority-specific recommendations, there is a need to provide ongoing supports to the wider sector outside of the confines of an individual, time-specific, review process. While the reviews programme has been effective in driving improvement at individual local authority level, the evaluation of the overall programme indicates that broader sectoral impact could be achieved by translating recurring findings into practical supports that can be adopted across the planning sector.

Development of local authority planning supports

The internal evaluation of the reviews programme provided further confirmation in relation to the commitment made in the OPR's new Strategy Statement to develop direct practical supports for local authority planning departments. There is significant scope for the development of model procedures, templates, tools and resource materials to support greater consistency in planning practice and improved procedures.

Accordingly, initial preparation work on a range of resource materials commenced during Q3, including:

- A guidance checklist has been developed as a practical support tool for planning authorities to assist in the consistent assessment and recording of notifications received under Class 3A (Detached House in the Rear Garden of a Principal House). The checklist provides a structured framework for assessing compliance with the statutory requirements of the exemption, while supporting good administrative practice, record management, monitoring and reporting.
- In addition, the commencement of Section 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 will introduce a significant new function for planning authorities. To support implementation, work has commenced on the preparation of a model standard operating procedure and associated templates.

Additional areas under consideration include the development of supports relating to the planning register and the administration of the new alteration, extension and revocation procedures introduced under Part 4 of the Planning and Development Act 2024. These resources will assist planning authorities in establishing consistent processes, strengthening statutory compliance, supporting effective decision-making and facilitating the efficient delivery of new functions.

Learning from Litigation bulletin

The OPR's Learning from Litigation bulletin is an example of an existing OPR support to the planning sector and will continue to issue on a quarterly basis.

The thirteenth edition of the *'Learning from Litigation'* bulletin was published in Q3. This edition was shared with stakeholders and promoted extensively via the OPR and Fieldfisher LinkedIn accounts. Contact was also made with the Irish Environmental Law Association (IELA) and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and the bulletin was shared with their members to increase awareness of the bulletin across a wider range of relevant stakeholder groups.

The cases featured in Issue 13 included:

- South Dublin County Council v Threshford Limited, Mullnassa Limited and Branach Developments Limited [2026] IEHC 342
- Stephen Keogh, Tom Quirke and Rural Residents Wind Aware and Environmental Group v An Coimisiún Pleanála and EDF Renewables Limited [2026] IEHC 339
- Abbey Park Residents Association Baldoyle and John Oliver McCann v An Coimisiún Pleanála and Rondesere Limited [2026] IEHC 365
- John Fox v Wicklow County Council, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Office of the Planning Regulator [2026] IEHC 412

In the Appeal Watch section of the bulletin, the Supreme Court judgment in respect of the Pat O'Donnell and Company v Dublin City Council and Uniphar Group PLC proceedings was featured, i.e. [2026] IESC 36.

OPR Education and Training Initiatives for Planning Officials

Knowledge Exchange Event

During Q3, in line with the OPR's statutory mandate to conduct education and training programmes for staff of local authorities, regional assemblies and An Coimisiún Pleanála in respect of matters relating to proper planning and sustainable development, the OPR delivered in-person training on the topic of 'Quarries and Extractive Industry: The Planning Issues'.

The presentations dealt with:

- Learnings from the OPR's Research, Reviews and Evaluation of Statutory Plans,
- Geoscience for Planning Assessment - Data and Resources,
- The EPA's Role in the Extractive Industry,
- Quarry Appeals, Substitute Consent and Retrospective Consent,
- Quarries and Aggregate Extraction: Key Planning Considerations, and
- Overview of Industry Perspective on the Typical Quarry Planning Process

The presentations were delivered by:

- Sinéad Mullen, Senior Planner, Office of the Planning Regulator,
- Clare Glanville, Senior Geologist, Geoheritage and Geoscience for Planning, Geological Survey Ireland,
- Billy Shanahan, Inspector, Office of Environment Enforcement, Environmental Protection Agency,
- Mary MacMahon, Assistant Director of Planning, An Coimisiún Pleanála,
- Bryan Riney, Senior Planner, Cork County Council, and
- Mark Galvin, President, Irish Concrete Federation (ICF).

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session.

Review of the Local Authority Planning Staff Learning and Development Strategy

During Q3, the OPR advanced work on the review of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy. The OPR had previously been requested to take the lead on the review by the Planning Services Training Group (PSTG). The PSTG oversees implementation of the Strategy and appointed a subgroup to review it. The subgroup, known as the Learning and Development Strategy Review Team (LDSRT), comprises representatives from the DHLGH, the CCMA, the LGMA and the OPR. Terms of Reference were agreed for the subgroup and the work undertaken by the OPR in Q3 aligned with those Terms of Reference.

Throughout Q3, the OPR:

- Gathered significant amounts of training data and operational information from the Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG). LASNTG is responsible for the rollout of the Planning Fundamentals and Intermediate Training as envisaged in the Strategy. This training has been rolled out since August 2024;
- Completed extensive desktop research;
- Undertook stakeholder consultation (meetings were held with the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), and An Coimisiún Pleanála),
- Prepared and arranged for the distribution of a survey to staff working in planning departments in local authorities seeking to gather information on their training needs, to identify barriers to their participation in training and to understand any perceived knowledge gaps and emerging training priorities; and
- Commenced drafting the review report which will ultimately be presented to the LDSRT and the PSTG and will inform any updates to the Learning and Development Strategy.

The stakeholder consultation phase is expected to conclude early in Q4, when meetings will be completed with the LA Planning Directors of Services and representatives from the planning institutes. In addition, the OPR will analyse the staff survey results, which will form part of its review report.

An Coimisiún Pleanála

In Q3, the OPR met with Senior Management in An Coimisiún Pleanála (the Commission) to discuss the following:

- the review of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy (this was part of the stakeholder consultation process), and
- the expansion of the OPR's statutory planning training function to encompass the development of education and training initiatives that are of benefit to the members and staff of the Commission.

Thereafter, the Commission designated a lead Learning and Development contact and a follow-up meeting was held where training and information-sharing opportunities were discussed together with the need to build capacity across the sector.

OPR case handling

Case handling activity

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

During Q3, the OPR received 71 cases and closed 69. Figure 2 details these by month.

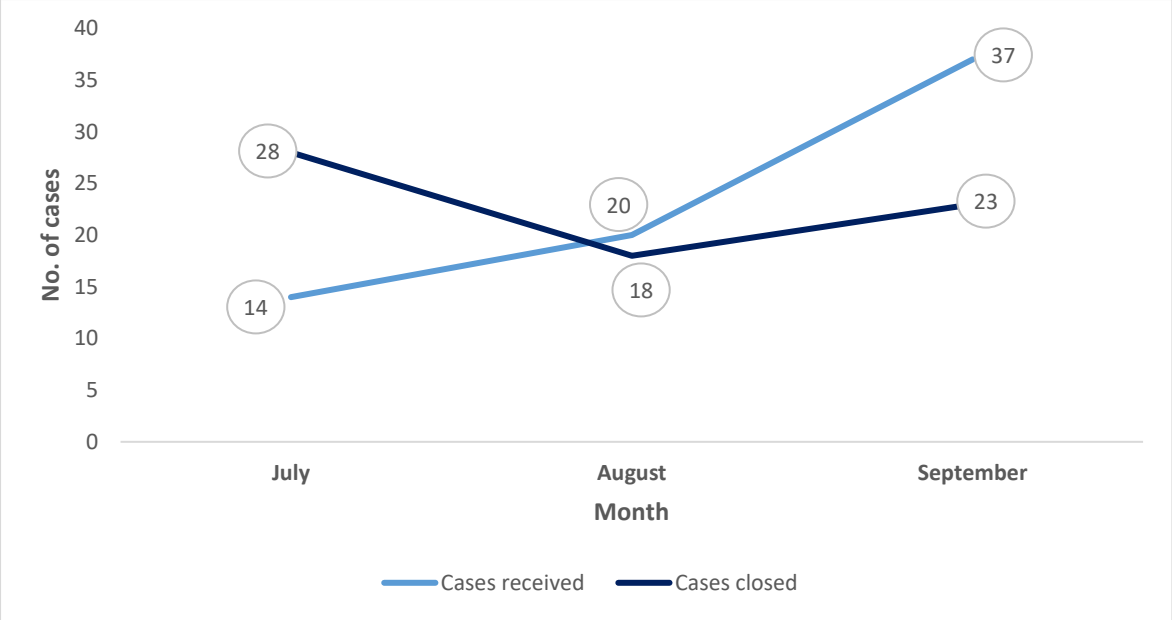


Figure 2 | Cases received vs cases closed Q3 2026

Of the 69 cases closed during Q3, the case types are categorised as follows:

- 38 complaints
- 21 queries
- 10 submissions

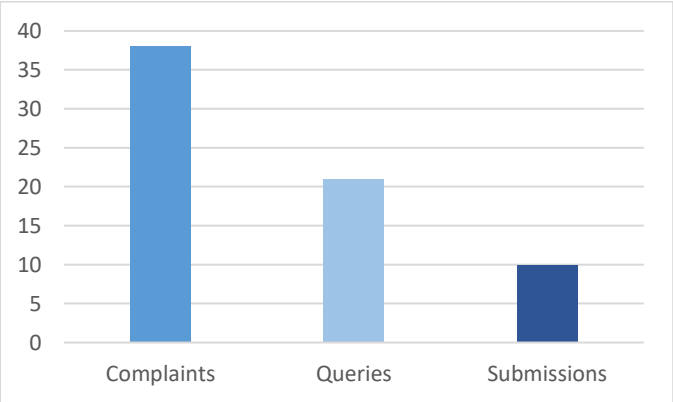


Figure 3 | Case types

Case handling themes

While a broad range of planning-related matters arose during Q3 2026, case handling activity remained concentrated around recurring themes that reflect ongoing public interest and complexity within the planning system. As cases may involve multiple issues, the thematic totals exceed the number of cases closed.

The diversity of themes arising during the quarter, ranging from enforcement and development management issues to exempted development, public consultation, wind energy and planning policy matters, highlights the breadth of the OPR's public-facing casework and the continued demand for independent information, clarification and examination of planning-related matters.

Based on the 69 cases closed during the quarter, as shown in Figure 3, the most frequent themes were enforcement and unauthorised development and statutory plan making. Matters relating to An Coimisiún Pleanála, and the OPR's role and functions each represented approximately 7% of thematic occurrences. Other regularly occurring themes included planning conditions, exempted development public consultation processes and wind energy developments.

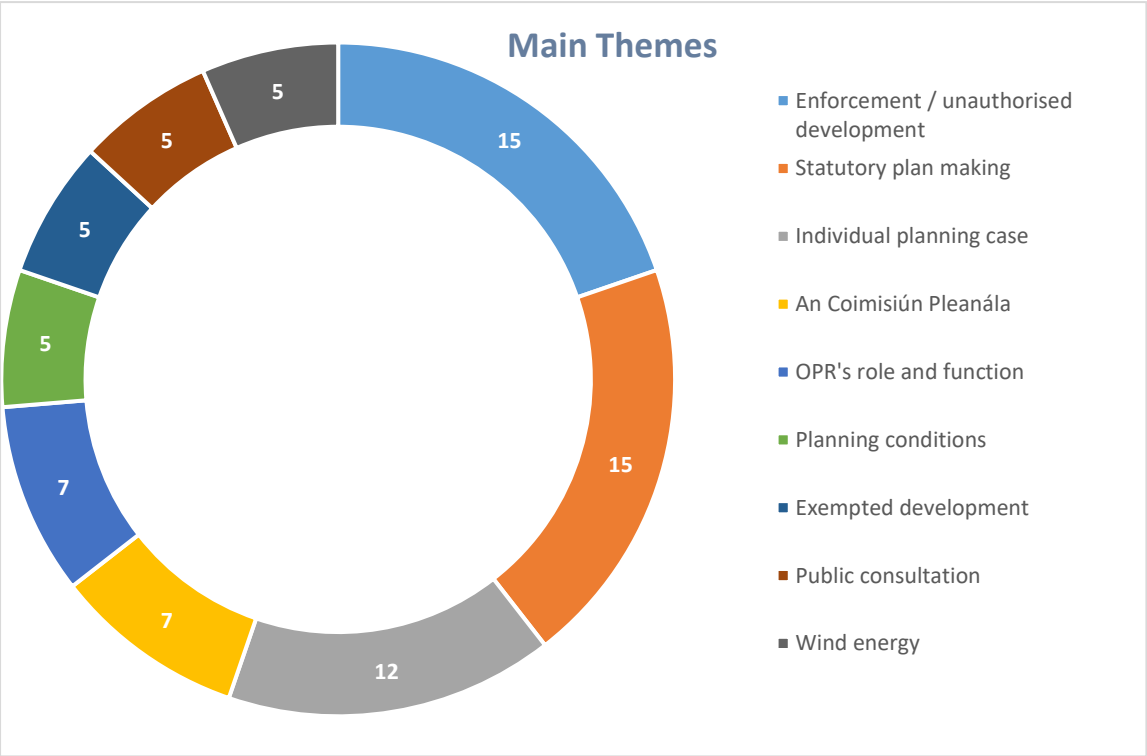


Figure 4 | Main themes of cases closed

The prominence of enforcement-related matters reflects ongoing public interest in local development issues. Many such cases involved requests for clarification on enforcement procedures, timelines, and local authorities' responsibilities under planning law. The volume of cases concerning statutory plan making, in many case, is attributable to activity across the local government sector involving development plan variations, material alterations and public consultation processes.

Complaints

The statutory provisions clearly define the types of complaints within the OPR's remit. For a complaint to be considered examinable by the OPR, it must relate to the organisation of the local authority, and the systems and procedures used by it in the performance of its planning functions.

Of the 38 complaints closed during Q3, the majority related to matters outside the OPR's statutory examination powers, including concerns regarding the merits of individual planning decisions, enforcement outcomes or third-party planning processes. The Office concluded two preliminary examinations during Quarter 3, neither of these complaints were upheld.

Planning Research and Communications

OPR Research Output

During Q3, the OPR advanced work on a number of research projects identified within the Strategic Planning Research Programme. In addition, the OPR Planning Research Framework 2020 is currently being updated to align with the Planning and Development Act 2024, the OPR's new Strategy Statement 2026 – 2031, and internal governance systems.

Strand One (Planning Issues) Projects

During Q3, a concept paper was prepared for a Research Series Report (RSR) on cost/benefit analysis of urban greening measures and cost-comparison with traditional construction costs.

Strand Two (Planning Performance) Projects

Work was advanced on Case Study Paper CSP08, which examines best practice in integrating green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and ecosystem services into the preparation of land use plans. Following on from a second draft of the report in Q2, preliminary findings were discussed at a LAWPro event. Peer engagement took place in Q3 and will continue into Q4. It is anticipated that the Case Study Paper will be finalised in Q4.

Strand Three (Planning Practice) Projects

Work continued on Practice Note PN06 on Development Plan Monitoring. All peer-review feedback was received and reviewed by the end of Q3. It is anticipated that the Practice Note will be finalised and published in Q4.

Work progressed on reviewing and updating the legislative elements of Practice Note PN01, Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, in conjunction with Fieldfisher LLP. This publication will be finalised in Q4.

Practice Note (PN03) Planning Conditions, a companion note on the theme of marine planning is progressing with publication on track for the end of Q4.

Spatial Planning Apprenticeship

The OPR is represented on the Consortium Steering Group (CSG) for the Spatial Planning Apprenticeship. This group comprises representatives from the DHLGH, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the CCMA, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), An Coimisiún Pleanála, the OPR, the Irish Planning Institute and the private sector. Work continues on the Apprenticeship programme which completed external validation in September. Expressions of interest have been sought from prospective employers, and it is intended that the first intake will commence in early 2027.

Communications and Data Analytics

Educational Pathways and Careers in Planning Campaign

The OPR continued working in partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on developing a campaign to promote educational pathways and careers in planning. Key actions included:

- Quantitative and qualitative market research.
- Developing an evidence-based creative and media approach featuring testimonials. from planners, students, HEI and senior leadership to demystify and raise awareness of the excellent career opportunities available within the planning profession.
- Developing online materials.
- Researching experiential opportunities for key audiences, such as Transition Year and other students to understand more about a career in planning.
- Sponsorship of CareersPortal competition for Transition Year students.

In addition, the OPR continues to actively promote educational pathways for planning with students, graduates and career changes using its LinkedIn account and quarterly newsletter.

Communications

Some key activities during this period included:

- The OPR 2026-2031 Strategy Statement was published
- An article by Niall Cussen, Planning Regulator will feature in the Planning Report in the November issue of Eolas magazine.
- Attending and promoting the OPR at the IPI Autumn Conference in October
- Redevelopment of the OPR website
- Work is underway to ensure the OPR Planning Leaflet series aligns with new legislation and regulations.

Data Analytics

Work has progressed on the development of an ‘indicator library’, which is a core element of the Practice Note on Development Plan Monitoring. The indicator library is a flexible framework for identifying and gathering data and monitoring indicators based on specific objectives. It provides direct links to a variety of high-quality data sources and data hubs.

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