



'PLANNING IN NUMBERS'

A Five-Year Strategic Review

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) has published 'Planning in Numbers' to provide a strategic review of key planning trends and outputs in Ireland over the last five years, and a comparison of patterns where figures are available for the 2019-2023 period.

The OPR's five-year review uses data from statistics published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and An Bord Pleanála (ABP).

Analysis focuses on key indicators related directly to functions such as forward planning; development management; planning appeals; planning enforcement, land activation, vacancy, legal challenges, and costs of operating local authority planning functions that are presented in the previous series. In addition, some indicators are introduced related to resources and climate action.

This analysis of 2023 data indicates that Ireland's planning system continues to perform statutory duties in the context of increased pressure. Data presented here reflects only part of the work of



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local authorities, who also undertake a significant volume of additional planning-related work such as development promotion, urban renewal and rural development.

“The figures for 2023 show that local authorities continued to concentrate their forward planning resources on preparing or completing their development plan reviews. The increase in the publications of issue papers for local area plans (LAPs) indicates that the local authorities have begun to focus on preparing detailed plans,” the OPR notes in its review.

RESOURCE CHALLENGES

According to the OPR, “Planning, like other sectors, is experiencing resource challenges as well as looking to technological advances and related challenges and opportunities. The Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources is welcomed and will assist the sector. It is interesting to look across the five-year period.

“This provides clarity on consistent and varying trends and figures. In the context of balanced regional growth, the five-year pattern of granted permissions for houses and apartments between regional assembly areas may merit investigation. In recent years new online planning application systems have been introduced in several local authorities. There may be value in investigating the level of invalid applications.”

The data shows the increasing cost of providing planning functions. While income from planning fees is increasing, this is at much lower rate. Planning fee income represents 17% of the overall cost of providing planning functions in 2022.

The review points out that all trends presented through different datasets need careful monitoring, while further consideration as the planning sector continues to evolve.

“Climate action is of growing importance, and planning-related actions are being adopted across the local authorities. Collating and utilising planning statistics related to climate action will be beneficial in supporting this vital work into the future.”

Moving towards the sixth year of collating annual figures, the OPR aims to provide these online to make an interactive resource available to support Ireland’s planning system.



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HIGHLIGHTS OF OPR FIVE-YEAR REVIEW:

- The volume of public consultation processes related to statutory plan-making grew from 2021-2023, with 64 public consultation processes in 2023: 51 related to local area plans, 13 related to city/county development plans.
- During 2023 valid planning applications decreased by 1,793 from 2022, to 30,578. The national rate for invalid applications has increased since 2021, with the average in 2023 at its highest in the last five years.
- The national planning application grant rate remained consistently high, between 87.4% and 89.2% over the five-year period.
- Planning applications approved in 2023 totalled 24,448.
- In 2023, 41,225 residential units were granted planning permission compared 34,177 for the previous year.
- One-off houses granted permission decreased from 6,924 in 2022 to 5,032 in 2023.
- Residential units completed continued to increase in 2023, with the rate of apartments higher than housing schemes and single houses.
- A requirement for over 500 technical and non-technical posts in local authority planning departments was identified in 2022 by the Local Government Management Agency, in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The implementation of the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources published in September 2024 will assist the sector.
- Data for 2023 show the increasing cost of providing statutory planning functions by local authorities with a low level of income through planning fees.
- Planning enforcement cases investigated by local authorities decreased to 6,783 from 6,959 during 2023.
- There was a small drop in derelict residential properties from 22,279 to 21,947 for 2023.
- 2023 was the first year during the five-year period when judicial review cases were taken against An Bord Pleanála decreased.
- A preliminary analysis of Climate Action Plan actions undertaken by the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) in October 2024 shows that over 3,935 actions were adopted across local authorities, 262 of which were planning related.

