



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Planning and Development Act 2000

Section 25A Progress Report 2022

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

1. Introduction

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) for the Southern Region forms part of an integrated hierarchy of statutory spatial plans that are established in legislation, with the National Planning Framework (NPF) at a national level, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) at regional level, and individual city and county plans and local area plans at county level.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region provides a spatial and investment strategy for the sustainable growth of the region that builds on the overarching policy and investment framework set by Project Ireland 2040, which combines the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP). The RSES has a policy influence on development plans of local authorities in Carlow, Clare, Cork, Kerry, Kilkenny, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford — which combined, have a population of almost 1.7 million people.

Since the adoption of the RSES, the Department (DHLGH) has undertaken a range of initiatives to secure the objectives of the RSES, including both funding and investment measures and introduced supporting legislation and regulation. This report provides a thematic overview of relevant measures in accordance with Section 25A of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

2. Investment and Oversight Structures

The National Planning Framework, aims to achieve more balanced and sustainable regional development in Ireland and this is reflected in the Departments Statement of Strategy 2021-2025. In this regard significant supports have been put in place to support the objectives of the RSES, with a particular focus on strategic planning, the delivery of well-planned homes in vibrant communities, the sustainable management of our water resources, the nurturing of Ireland's heritage and the promotion of effective local government. Relevant examples of investment schemes include:

- Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Croí Conaithe Scheme, for both towns and cities.
- Affordable Housing Fund to enable the provision of affordable housing.
- The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) for social housing.

- Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP).
- Delivery by Irish Water, the Land Development Agency and the Housing Agency.
- Oversight by bodies such as NOAC, OPR, RTB and An Bord Pleanála.

3. Regional Demographics and Structural Housing Demand

In order to give effect to the national and regional settlement strategies set out in the NPF and RSES and with the objective of supporting and improving the plan-making process, the Housing and Planning Divisions of the Department jointly engaged the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake independent research into structural housing demand in Ireland to 2040. The findings of the ESRI work were published in December 2020 as a research paper on *Regional Demographics and Structural Housing Demand at a County Level*,¹ which provides a robust housing demand projection to inform policy and investment with regard to housing at national, regional and local levels. The ESRI projection model and paper are now the definitive source of information for Government. The research provides a consistent national methodology for translating population targets under the NPF and RSES into projected demand for new households.

Planning guidelines on *Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning* were published in December 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The projected annual average requirement to accommodate the needs of more than 33,000 new households in Ireland from 2020-31, when disaggregated to each individual local authority area, forms the basis for an annual average Housing Supply Target to 2031. The inclusion of an appropriate Housing Supply Target, calculated in accordance with the guidelines, now comprises a key element of the core strategy of individual development plans. The Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, published in June 2022 provide further guidance in relation to the zoning of land to meet identified housing need that reflects the NPF and RSES priorities for brownfield and infill development and sustainable urban extension. Oversight of this process is provided by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) as part of its statutory plan evaluation function.

The results of Census 2022 will provide an early indication of progress made in transitioning to the NPF strategy for regionally balanced, city focused and compact growth when available. CSO housing construction data and preliminary Census results published in June 2022 show that while there has been continued growth in all regions, the east of the country

¹ Bergin, A. and G. Rodriguez (2020). Regional demographics and structural housing demand at a county level, ESRI Research Series 111, Dublin: ESRI, <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs111>

and counties surrounding Dublin continue to dominate and that regional cities in particular have not had a proportionate level of growth. The HSTs methodology set out in the s. 28 Guidelines published in 2020, recognises that convergence to the NPF strategy would take time and provides for a convergence period to 2026.

To facilitate convergence with the NPF development scenario, the Government is enhancing the alignment of public investment with the NPF objectives through Project Ireland 2040, which comprises the NPF and the National Development Plan 2021-2030. There is a particular emphasis on measures to stimulate and support urban brownfield and public transport-led housing development at scale, measures to encourage accelerated regional-city growth and balanced regional development in accordance with the NPF strategy. The most recent updates on specific NDP projects in the region can be viewed online in the NDP Projects Tracker. Convergence will also be driven by the adoption of City and County development plans in the region and by the continued targeted investment in enabling infrastructure and social and economic development.

4. Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration

The NPF and RSES include specific objectives to regenerate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale, and in particular to reverse the stagnation or decline of urban centres, including measures to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area based regeneration. Development Plans must meet the specific targets for ‘infill’ and ‘brownfield’ development in the Core Strategy. This focussing of growth within the existing built up area of cities and towns is a new policy requirement and is supported by a range of departmental initiatives, from funding for regeneration and public realm projects through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) to regulatory measures such as the vacant site levy, proposed Residential Zoned Land Tax, and simplifying requirements for change of use from commercial to residential in town centres.

From a funding perspective, significant resources are being provided to enhance the urban environment of our cities, towns and villages through the URDF and Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) under Project Ireland 2040. The URDF fund was launched in 2018 and has an overall provision of €2 billion to support projects that will contribute to regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland’s five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the NPF and NDP and the RSES. The aim is to achieve more compact, sustainable and mixed use development, with a view to ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and

work, as well as to invest and visit. A wide range of proposals have been supported in the RSES area that will contribute to the redevelopment of key brownfield areas, including areas containing derelict sites and buildings. This will be achieved through both enabling infrastructure and new master-planned development proposals. A list of specific URDF projects is outlined later in Section 7 of this report.

Local authorities have been provided with a range of powers and mechanisms to deal with vacancy and dereliction in urban centres and to incentivise redevelopment and renewal. Examples include:

- The vacant site levy, introduced by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, which empowers local authorities to compile a vacant site register and to apply a levy to properties listed on the vacant site register. The rate increased from 3% to 7% of the market valuation of relevant properties from 2019. Site owners became liable to pay from 2020.
- The Derelict Sites Act 1990 imposes a duty on every owner and occupier of land to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. The Act also imposes a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps to ensure that land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site;
- The Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018 provide for an exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises, including vacant areas above ground floor premises, to residential use. This measure is aimed at facilitating the productive re-use of qualifying vacant commercial buildings as homes, while also facilitating urban renewal and the bringing on stream of increased housing supply. In February 2022 Minister O'Brien signed the Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022, which extend the operation of the 2018 Regulations until 2025.
- The Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund provides a grant to support the refurbishment of vacant properties in towns and villages, with priority given to areas with high levels of vacancy or dereliction.

- The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Fund launched in May 2022 seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments in cities. The scheme is expected to deliver up to 5,000 additional apartments in the five cities including the Cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford. It will support the Government's objectives of compact growth and creating vibrant liveable cities. The scheme is targeting the activation of existing planning permissions for apartment developments over four-storeys in height that cost more to build than they can be sold for to individual buyers. The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme will bridge the viability gap for developments that meet the eligibility criteria. The Government has allocated €450 million for the scheme up to 2026.

Under the National Vacant Home Reuse Strategy, the Vacant Homes Unit in the Department provided annual funding to each local authority to support the work of a Vacant Homes Office. Each office is tasked to support, implement and further develop, update, monitor and review the progress of local authorities' Vacant Homes Action Plans and actions to address vacant private housing; in addition to other core functions to identify and bring vacant homes back into use. In addition, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, two schemes were introduced to assist in bringing vacant stock back into use:

- The Repair and Leasing Scheme was introduced to assist property owners in bringing vacant properties back into use for social housing. The scheme is particularly targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental properties.
- The Buy and Renew Scheme was introduced to support local authorities in purchasing and renewing housing in need of repair for social housing use. The Buy and Renew Scheme particularly focuses on older vacant homes to help tackle dereliction and improve the appearance of the built environment.

The importance of promoting urban renewal and brownfield regeneration is reflected in 'Town Centre First' policy, prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development and published in February 2022. Town Centre First aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into town centres. The policy contains actions to provide towns with the tools and resources required to become more viable and attractive places and recognises the intrinsic importance that built and natural heritage contributes to this. Heritage and climate action

approaches illustrated in the policy were drawn from exemplars of heritage-led funding of the Historic Towns Initiative and the Historic Structures Fund.

The Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2022 include mechanisms to improve the monitoring of brownfield targets in plans, in order to provide a more regular, annual monitoring and report process for local authorities.

The Built Heritage Policy Unit is engaging with local authorities on new policy initiatives including Heritage Ireland 2030, the National Policy on Architecture and the New European Bauhaus. It has also made recommendations for the long-term protection and sustainable development of towns and places through heritage-led regeneration to combat dereliction and vacancy, and contribute to climate action, vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes. In partnership with the Heritage Council the Department supported a number of pilot projects to inform new policies and urban renewal programmes. The dissemination of research is through the Collaborative Town Health Check Programme, project managed by the Heritage Council, and through the OPR's training remit.

5. Housing

Under Housing for All, the Government plans to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. This includes the delivery of 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes by 2030. Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

In September 2021, Social Housing delivery targets were issued to each local authority for the period 2022 to 2026. A key action of Housing for All is that local authorities will develop and submit Housing Delivery Action Plans. The plans set out details of both social and affordable housing delivery over the period 2022 to 2026. All local authorities have submitted their Housing Delivery Action Plans and the Department is now working closely with local authorities to review and finalise the plans, having regard to the targets and policy objectives set out in Housing for All.

Social Housing by Local Authorities through the Build, Acquisition and Leasing Streams 2018-2021

<i>LOCAL AUTHORITY</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>
CARLOW	157	212	170	240
CLARE	232	154	148	232
CORK CITY	458	694	399	263
CORK COUNTY	410	619	546	489
KERRY	289	325	294	270
KILKENNY	185	299	183	226
LIMERICK	280	263	193	323
TIPPERARY	212	265	193	177
WATERFORD	303	269	292	366
WEXFORD	287	278	277	299
SRA REGION	2813	3378	2695	2885

The Department also publishes the Social Housing Construction Status Report which provides details of social housing developments across the region that have been completed, are under construction or are progressing through design and pre-tender processes. The most recent publication for Q1 2022 is available on gov.ie.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the leasing of houses and apartments. These properties are either privately owned or owned by AHBs. Properties made available under the programme are used to accommodate households from local authority waiting lists. The following schemes are currently supported under SHCEP:

- properties leased and owned by AHBs, including properties funded under CALF, and delivered under payment and availability agreements;
- direct leasing by local authorities from private owners;
- properties in the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS);
- AHB Mortgage to Rent (MTR) and the expanded MTR scheme;

- properties leased to local authorities and AHBs from NARPS;
- unsold Affordable Dwellings managed by AHBs for local authorities; and
- enhanced leasing.

Spending under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme*

LOCAL AUTHORITY	2019	2020	2021
CARLOW	€2,763,834	€3,135,425	€4,661,136
CLARE	€3,484,952	€4,267,469	€5,241,381
CORK CITY	€5,351,366	€9,846,298	€12,898,438
CORK COUNTY	€4,850,275	€6,074,676	€9,638,133
KERRY	€2,957,614	€5,102,181	€7,797,848
KILKENNY	€1,614,842	€2,894,685	€4,019,232
LIMERICK	€2,144,675	€2,712,760	€5,284,141
TIPPERARY	€3,188,813	€3,564,335	€4,403,176
WATERFORD	€2,265,080	€4,043,093	€4,287,868
WEXFORD	€3,543,358	€4,190,438	€7,246,073
SRA REGION	€32,164,809	€45,831,360	€65,477,426

*The above spend excludes admin costs paid directly to AHBs and miscellaneous costs under the SHCEP scheme

The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme in addition to promoting city focused and compact growth seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments and to provide those who wish to purchase a home with greater choice. Under the scheme a viability fund will support the construction of apartments for eligible schemes in the five cities by bridging the gap between what owner occupiers can pay and what it costs to build the apartments. The Government has allocated €450 million for the scheme up to 2026.

New planning guidelines on the Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing, published in May 2021, seek to ensure housing choice by preventing multiple housing and duplex units being sold to a single buyer. Apartments are not included as the primary focus is protecting traditional family homes while enabling continuing investment where it is needed i.e. apartment developments with viability constraints.

6. Rural Development

The National Planning Framework and RSES supports the concept of the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging their growth and prosperity while also seeking to arrest the decline in areas that have experienced low population growth in recent decades. Chapter 5.3 'Planning for the Future Growth and Development of Rural Areas' of the NPF includes several specific national policy objectives that aim to support the sustainable development of rural areas and deliver strengthened and diversified rural communities. Town Centre First policy reflects the challenges faced by towns and villages in rural areas and their need to function as viable and vibrant locations for people to live and work. Investment for the development of rural Ireland is available through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, both administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Underpinned by significant NDP funding, the RRDF provides an opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a sustainable impact in rural communities, and to address depopulation in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the NPF and RSES relating to Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities.

7. Placemaking and Green Infrastructure

The RSES objectives emphasises the importance of regeneration and placemaking as a driver of change to revitalise urban areas and notes that placemaking is critical to sustained socio-economic vibrancy. High quality placemaking has been supported by the Department through the targeting of URDF funding towards transformative urban regeneration projects. The fund, which was established in 2018 under the National Development Plan, is applicant led and all applications for support are assessed in terms of their alignment with the intended purpose of the programme and their viability before being considered for approval. There have been two calls for proposals. In 2019, approval in principle and provisional funding allocations issued in respect of the 87 projects approved under Call 1. A further 45 projects were approved under Call 2. A total of 46 projects in the Southern Region have been successful to date, with provisional allocations with a combined value of over €787 million.

Southern Region - URDF Provisional Funding Allocations

LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA	PROJECT	PROVISIONAL ALLOCATION
CARLOW	Carlow Town Master Plan	€580,000
	Public Realm and Pedestrian Linkage Project in Carlow Town	€17,085,027
CLARE	The Venue Shannon	€250,000
	Parnell Street and the Lanes and Bow-Ways	€3,665,339
	Barrack Square and Old Barrack Street and O'Connell Square and High Street	€189,000
	Ennis Town Centre Public Realm Regeneration	€4,042,771
CORK CITY	Beamish and Crawford / Grand Parade Quarter	€916,000
	Cork City Docklands	€450,000
	Tivoli Docks	€1,312,500
	Kent Station Yard (Site enabling)	€750,000
	Cork City Docklands	€353,407,500
	Grand Parade Quarter	€46,050,000
CORK COUNTY	Carrigaline Western Relief Road	€6,400,208
	Midleton Main Street Public Improvements	€1,921,985
	Midleton Permeability Package of Proposals	€187,500
	Cobh UEA - Public Realm - Diaspora Centre	€277,500
	Carrigaline Public Realm	€112,500
	Carrigtwohill – Design and Planning works	€562,500
	Mallow Town Regeneration	€1,480,500
	Mallow Town Centre Regeneration.	€4,706,700
	Passage West - Ringaskiddy - Carrigaline Harbour Cluster	€817,500
KERRY	Phase I Tralee Town Centre - Rock Street, Russell Street and Bridge Street	€2,606,511
	Smarter Travel Killarney (Link & Public Realm)	€1,000,000
	Áras Phádraig Masterplan	€112,500
	Destination Killarney	€16,068,429
	Positioning Tralee as a Regional Economic Driver and Destination Town	€15,936,717
KILKENNY	Abbey Quarter (Public Realm enabling)	€6,154,000
	Abbey Quarter Phase 2 Advancement Project	€11,460,000
	Kilkenny City Enhanced Liveability Project	€6,641,000
LIMERICK	O'Connell Street Urban Centre Revitalisation Project	€4,500,000
	Digital Collaboration and Virtual Reality Centre	€937,500
	Worldclass Waterfront	€350,000
	Social and Economic Model	€110,000
	Living Georgian City Programme	€1,200,000
	Opera Project (Site enabling)	€1,839,000

	Digital District (Inner City Digital Hub)	€750,000
	Living Limerick City Centre Initiative	€42,616,690
	Worldclass Waterfront	€73,400,000
TIPPERARY	Liberty Square	€5,390,291
	Clonmel 2030 Transformational Regeneration	€10,594,961
	Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Energy driving the transformational urban regeneration of Nenagh Town Centre	€9,525,000
WATERFORD	Waterford City and Environs - North Quays (Infrastructure enabling)	€80,618,212
	Tramore Town Centre	€2,172,500
	Waterford City Centre Regeneration	€27,661,564
WEXFORD	Trinity Wharf Project	€2,028,000
	Trinity Wharf	€18,485,000
SRA Region	46 Projects	~ €787m

In relation to green infrastructure, the inclusion of policy in relation to green infrastructure and nature based water management solutions in development plans is promoted by the s. 28 Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities published in June 2022. The Water Division also published guidance in March 2022 in relation to the nature based management of rainwater and surface water runoff in urban areas, titled “Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document. Significant progress has been made in this area in recent years at a regional level and through adoption of climate adaptation, heritage, and biodiversity plans at a local level.

8. Heritage

Heritage Ireland 2030 is Ireland’s new national heritage plan. It is built around a vision of our heritage – in all its forms – being at the very centre of local and national discourse, valued by all and cared for and protected for future generations. At the heart of this framework are three themes: communities, leadership and partnerships. These reflect the importance of ongoing collaboration between government and communities, heritage organisations, individuals and local authorities in caring and planning for our heritage. The plan suggests a series of structures under which stakeholders can come together to advance the protection of Ireland’s heritage through over 150 actions. These structures will be established ahead of the publication of an implementation plan in the third quarter of this year.

A Living Tradition: A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage, looks at ways of assessing and managing our unique heritage assets. The three themes acknowledge that our vernacular heritage is part of our past but continues to be used in the present and should also be part of our future. The first theme, understanding, looks at the root causes of abandonment of vernacular buildings, the potential for rehabilitation and reuse, and ways of dealing more effectively with them. The second theme, minding, focuses on the sustainability of vernacular buildings, feeding the results into conservation and maintenance. The third theme, handing on, looks forward in time, exploring exemplars for sensitive adaptation, conservation and extension of vernacular buildings. Linked to this, the Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). The Community Monuments Fund (CMF) introduced this year is for conservation and other works at national monuments.

This year 590 heritage projects across every county in the country have benefited from a combined sum of €8m under BHIS and HSF. The Department supports projects under the CMF for investment in archaeological heritage. The fund is prioritised for local authorities, private owners and custodians, and community groups for the care, maintenance, protection and promotion of local monuments and historic sites. Approximately €6m has been invested under the CMF.

The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department and the Heritage Council and provides a template for heritage-led regeneration. Heritage-led regeneration can stimulate economic activity as footfall and visitor numbers increase and opportunities arise to address retail and commercial vacancy. A total of €2 million has been allocated for the heritage-led regeneration of towns around the country and a total of 23 towns have benefitted under the scheme with a variety of projects funded, including the following towns in the Southern Region:

- Tipperary - Glove Factory Tipperary Town. Reuse of the Glove Factory building in Tipperary town for four apartments and a commercial space. This building has been vacant and unused for almost 50 years and is of regional significance.
- Kerry - Revitalising a market town, Listowel, with building upgrades.
- Wexford - Wexford Town Heritage-led Regeneration Plan 2022.

- Wexford - Templeshannon Food and Community Hub Project 2022. The aim of the project is the renovation of the ground floor of a significant heritage building in Templeshannon, Enniscorthy, into a food and community hub.
- Cork - St.Colman's, former Church of Ireland building, Macroom. Emergency conservation and investigative works. The aim of the project is to safeguard the building from further deterioration and carry out investigative works which will allow for the development of the building for community use in the future.
- Kilkenny - Bridge Street Conservation Plan. Compile a strategic and tailored approach to urban regeneration to address the current vacancy and dereliction levels in historic Bridge Street, Callan, Co. Kilkenny.
- Carlow - Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan application for Burrin Street, Carlow Town.
- Limerick - Askeaton Public Realm Improvements; focused primarily around the West Square. Projects to include undergrounding of overhead wires and reuse of a derelict site to create a pocket park.

Arising from Ireland's ratification of the European Landscape Convention, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 was launched in May 2015. In 2022, personnel from the Built Heritage Policy Unit and National Monuments Services undertook to contribute to a pilot undertaken by the EPA on landscape character assessment, the outcomes of which will inform a wider landscape character assessment approach.

In terms of National Parks, such as the Burren and Killarney in the Southern Region, Project Ireland 2040 investment consists of ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the 87,000 hectare network of sites. The NPWS also operate a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Fund. The fund has grown in popularity since it launched in 2018. €1.2 million was allocated to 31 Local Authorities for 120 Biodiversity Projects in 2021.

9. Architecture and Design

Places for People, a new National Policy on Architecture was launched in May 2022, and promotes quality in architecture and the built environment for increased environmental, economic and social sustainability and resilience. The policy vision emphasises the power of architecture and design to support a more sustainable and resilient society based on knowledge and creativity and driven by leadership and inclusive participation.

The policy supports the implementation of architectural and built environment priorities in the NPF, the Climate Action Plan 2021, Housing for All and Town Centre First. In the European context, policy direction and funding mechanisms stem from the European Green Deal, including the Renovation Wave, Just Transition and the New European Bauhaus.

10. Water Services

The Irish Water Strategic Funding Plan sets out the capital and operational costs expected to be incurred by Irish Water over the period of 2019 to 2024 and how these costs fall to be recovered. In doing so it ensures a shared understanding between Government and Irish Water of its broad financial parameters and investment priorities. The plan identifies an overall funding requirement of €11bn to 2024, comprised of a €6.1bn investment in infrastructure and assets and €4.9bn in operating costs.

The Programme for Government commits to funding Irish Water's capital investment plan for drinking water and waste water infrastructure on a multi-annual basis, and this is supported through the National Development Plan. Other funding sources include a combination of non-domestic revenue, excess usage charges and non-domestic borrowings and capital contributions. As well as significant investment to improve compliance with public health and environmental standards, the plan specifically aims to ensure that water services investment supports the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Recently updated water services capacity registers have also assisted in this regard. Major water services projects benefitting from NDP funding in the region include the following.

NAME OF PROJECT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COMMENCED	COMPLETION	COST RANGE
CENTRAL KERRY REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY SCHEME - UPGRADE OF LOUGH GUITANE WATER TREATMENT PLANT	Development of a new water treatment plant including monitoring and control systems, network modelling and pipeline rehabilitation, as well as refurbishment and construction of new reservoirs.	2016	2018	€20m-€50m
CORK CITY WATER SUPPLY SCHEME - UPGRADE OF WATER TREATMENT PLANT	Upgrade of existing Water Treatment Plant to replace and extend the water treatment facility at the Lee Road to provide a more secure water supply.	2019	2022	€20m-€50m
CORK CITY WASTEWATER NETWORK	Irish Water is progressing the drainage area planning phase of the Cork City Wastewater Network.	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal

CORK LOWER HARBOUR MAIN DRAINAGE PROJECT	The Project is required to significantly enhance the water quality in Cork Harbour and provide for a growing population.	2016	2022	€100m-€250m
SKIBBEREEN REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY SCHEME - WATER TREATMENT PLANT & NETWORK	The Skibbereen Regional Water Supply Project addresses the water quality deficiencies in Schull, Leap, Baltimore, Drimoleague and Skibbereen.	2019	2021	€20m-€50m
TRALEE WASTEWATER NETWORK	Irish Water are progressing the drainage area planning phase of the Tralee Wastewater Network.	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal
CARLOW WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	This project involves upgrading the existing wastewater treatment facilities to meet the Waster Water Discharge Authorisation standards.	2023	2025	€20m-€50m
CLONROADMORE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	The project consists of the construction, commissioning and testing of an expansion to the Clonroadmore Wastewater Treatment Plant, which will increase the facility capacity.	2024	2026	€20m-€50m
LAHINCH WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	Upgrade of the existing Wastewater Treatment Plant; provide capacity for current and future growth, as well as compliance with standards.	2024	2025	€20m-€50m
LIMERICK WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	Works required for UWWT Directive compliance having regard to the existing very significant licenced industrial loads.	2024	2027	€50m-€100m
MALLOW WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	Upgrade to ensure compliance with the Urban Wastewater Directive.	2021	2023	€20m-€50m
MIDLETON WASTEWATER NETWORK	Wastewater Network Infrastructure extension to facilitate housing development in the high growth area of Midleton (Water-Rock) in County Cork.	Subject to Appraisal	2029	Subject to Appraisal
WATERFORD CITY WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT	Upgrade of Wastewater Treatment Plant to protect environment and quality of receiving waters and facilitate growth	2024	2026	€20m-€50m

NATIONAL LABORATORY (LIMERICK)	Irish Water is developing a national laboratory in Limerick with an expected analytical capacity of approximately 1.2 million tests per year.	2021	2024	€20m-€50m
BANDON WATER MAIN AND SEWER NETWORK UPGRADE	Upgrading of 5km of combined sewers and removal of 10 combined sewer overflows, with the objective of reducing overflows to the Bandon River.	2018	2021	€20m-€50m
CORK CITY WATER SUPPLY SCHEME - BALLYNORA BALLINCOLLIG RESERVOIR	The purpose of this project is to incorporate a high-level reservoir into the Cork Harbour and City Water Supply Scheme. The reservoir will provide storage for the Ballincollig area.	2027	2029	€20m-€50m
MIDLETON WATER SUPPLY SCHEME - INTERCONNECTION TO INNISCARRA REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY SCHEME	The principal objective of the Extension of the Cork Harbour and City Water Supply Scheme to Midleton and Whitegate project is to address the demand deficiencies and water quality risks in the two supplies.	2027	2029	€20m-€50m
BALLYVOLANE AND MONARD WASTEWATER NETWORK	Irish Water has entered into a Project Works Service Agreement (PWSA) with Developers for the design of a new Ballyvolane Pumping Station to cater for growth in the area.	2027	2029	€20m-€50m
MIDLETON WASTEWATER TRANSFER PROJECT	A Wastewater Transfer Project for Midleton, Co. Cork.	2024	2026	€20m-€50m

Funding under the Rural Water Programme provides for capital investment in the rural water sector where public services are not available or planned, and operational and management subsidies for the group water sector. Funding is made available through a multi-annual programme which comprises of a range of measures aimed at improving the quality, reliability and efficiency of the rural water services serving rural households. Current funding provides an annual subsidy payable to group water schemes towards their operational and management costs of supplying water for domestic use. Demand led funding is available for improvements to private wells and on-site wastewater treatment systems.

Irish Water's 'Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme' is intended to provide capacity primarily in Wastewater Treatment Plants to cater for growth in smaller settlements which

would not otherwise be provided for in the larger scale investment plan. An overall budget of €98 million was allocated to the programme over the five years to 2024. The programme is directed at settlements with a population of less than 2,000 persons, with identified capacity constraints and where no Irish Water capacity upgrade project is currently proposed. The programme offers the potential for housing development in settlements in rural areas as an alternative to one-off development. Furthermore, the water main rehabilitation program is strategically planned to reduce interruptions from water main bursts, improve water quality and replace end-of-life assets.

11. Marine Planning

Key developments since the adoption of the RSES have been the publication of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), and the enactment of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021. The NMPF was launched in July 2021 and represents the proposed approach to managing Ireland's marine activities to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources to 2040. This single framework, bringing together all marine-based human activities, and sets out objectives and planning policies for each activity. Those activities include offshore renewable energy; fisheries; ports, harbours and shipping; safety at sea; sport and recreation; tourism; and wastewater treatment and disposal. The NMPF will be the key decision-making tool for Government departments, state agencies, regulatory authorities and policymakers for decisions on marine activities.

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 constitutes the biggest reform of marine governance since the foundation of the State, with a legal and administrative framework to support a marine environment that Ireland can benefit from socially, environmentally and economically. The Act establishes a new planning regime for the maritime area and will be a key enabler of decarbonisation of Ireland's energy sources and the development of offshore energy. It streamlines arrangements on the basis of a single consent principle, i.e. one State consent (Maritime Area Consent) to enable occupation of the Maritime Area and one development consent (planning permission), with a single environmental assessment.

The NMPF is a parallel document to the National Planning Framework. In future, it will be important that national, regional and local plans are consistent with the NMPF.

12. State Bodies

A number of other bodies under the remit of the Department have also contributed to supporting the objectives of the RSES, an outline of which is set out below.

Land Development Agency

The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on an interim basis in September 2018 by way of an Establishment Order made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971. The Land Development Agency Act 2021 was enacted in July 2021 and following commencement of relevant provisions, the Land Development Agency Designated Activity Company was incorporated in December 2021. Following the dissolution of the interim entity, the LDA has been established as a commercial state body. The agency assists implementation of RSES objectives by coordinating appropriate State lands for regeneration and development, opening up key sites which are not being used effectively for housing delivery, and driving strategic land supply and assembly for housing. LDA is currently progressing plans to develop housing schemes in Cork at the former St Kevin's Hospital site and in the Cork docklands, in addition to at Colbert Station, Limerick.

Housing Agency

The Housing Agency works with the Department, local authorities and AHBs in the delivery of housing and housing services. The agency is involved in delivery of a wide range of actions, including policy development through the provision of data analysis and research and the publication of best practice guidance. It also supports local authorities and AHBs through project feasibility and development of housing, procurement and contracts preparation and advisory services on Part V delivery, turnkey delivery, and design and build tenders. The agency supports a wide range of projects and provides project management, design, and contract administration for construction projects. A recent major project that the agency has been involved in includes the phased development of the Cork North West Quarter Regeneration.

Office of the Planning Regulator

The OPR has sought to secure the objectives of the RSES via the three statutory functions of the Office, namely (a) assessment of statutory plans (b) reviews of local authority planning functions and (c) education, training and research and awareness. The OPR carries out an assessment and evaluation of statutory plans to ensure consistency with national and regional planning policy. These include City and County Development Plans (including Variations) and Local Area Plans (including Alterations). The OPR makes submissions at the different plan stages, as appropriate.

The RSES for the SRA was adopted in January 2020, initiating the review of the county and city development plans in that region. The plan review process (to incorporate alignment with the RSES) is ongoing for Counties Kerry, Clare and Tipperary. Seven local authorities completed their plan-making process with the adoption of their plans. Of the seven adopted plans, the OPR assessment of the adopted plan remains ongoing for recently adopted development plans for Limerick City and County, Cork City and Kerry County.

The table below sets out all submissions made by the OPR to draft City/County Development Plans in the region between January 2020 and June 2022. As part of the OPR's plans evaluation methodology, regional policy and the objectives of the RSES is a key consideration.

OPR Submissions on draft Development Plans in the SRA area (Jan 2020 – June 2022)

<i>LOCAL AUTHORITY</i>	<i>ISSUES PAPER</i>	<i>DRAFT PLAN</i>	<i>MATERIAL ALTERATIONS</i>
CARLOW	1	1	1
CLARE	1	1	0
CORK CITY	1	1	1
CORK COUNTY	1	1	1
KERRY	1	1	1
KILKENNY	1	1	1
LIMERICK	1	1	1
TIPPERARY	1	1	1
WATERFORD	1	1	1
WEXFORD	1	1	1
SRA REGION	10	10	9

A further 10 submissions were made on draft LAPs as outlined in the following table.

OPR Submissions on draft Local Area Plans in the SRA area (Jan 2020 – June 2022)

<i>LOCAL AUTHORITY</i>	<i>ISSUES PAPER</i>	<i>DRAFT PLAN</i>	<i>MATERIAL ALTERATIONS</i>	
CARLOW	0	1	1	- Graiguenamanagh / Tinnahinch Joint LAP ¹ 2021-2027
KERRY	0	1	2	- Listowel Municipal District Local Area Plan ² 2019 – 2025 - Corca Dhuibhne Electoral Area Local Area Plan 2020 – 2026

KILKENNY	0	1	1	- Graigueenamanagh / Tinnahinch Joint LAP 2021-2027
LIMERICK	0	1	2	- Croom Local Area Plan 2020 – 2026 ² - Southern Environs LAP 2021 – 2027
TIPPERARY	0	1	1	- Cahir Local Area Plan 2021 - 2027
SRA REGION	0	4	6*	(*See footnotes.)

¹The Graigueenamanagh/Tinnahinch Joint LAP 2021-2027 was one submission between two local authorities, Carlow and Kilkenny, therefore it appears twice in Table 2 but is only counted once.

²The OPR made a submission on the draft Plan in 2019

The OPR made a total of **156 recommendations** and **113 observations** on reviews of draft plans in the Southern Region between January 2020 and June 2022. In relation to the recommendations, 38 specifically related to consistency with the objectives of the RSES. Key themes covered included settlement hierarchy, core strategy, compact growth, rural housing and the MASP. In relation to observations, 14 related to consistency with the objectives of the RSES.

The OPR's training and research programme supports the implementation of regional policy objectives by upskilling and informing staff, elected representatives and decision makers in local authorities and regional assemblies on the principles, policies and procedures that support the implementation of the RSES.

An Bord Pleanála

Under Section 143 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, An Bord Pleanála is required to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in the performance of its functions. Section 37 of the Act provides that where a planning authority has decided to refuse permission for development on the grounds that a proposed development materially contravenes the development plan, the Board may grant permission where it considers, inter alia, that permission for the proposed development should be granted having regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the area. Furthermore, under Section 37A, strategic infrastructure developments are dealt with directly by the Board in cases including where the scheduled development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the RSES.

13. Conclusion

As demonstrated, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has made a significant contribution to supporting the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region in the period since its adoption. The RSES continues to

play an important role in transposing the national policy objectives of the NPF to regional level and has been a key policy influence for the newly adopted development plans across the region. The Department looks forward to working with the SRA over the remainder of the lifespan of the strategy to achieve balanced and sustainable regional development.

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Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage



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