



Association of Directors of  
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

## **Sub-national and subject board updates 2023**

### North West Board

The North West Board meets bi-monthly and provides an informal network for local authority Place Directors, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Transport for the North, to discuss and influence emerging policy and strategy, focusing on key cross cutting themes and bringing subject group expertise. The Board seeks to keep members up to date on current issues, and to share knowledge and best practice between members, offering peer support and networking.

The Board has received a number of presentations across a wide variety of policy topics and speakers from Government bodies, public and private sector. The key areas of focus this year have been Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the future of Local Transport Plans, Active Travel, Bus Funding, EV infrastructure, Levelling Up, Autumn Budget, Live Labs 2, Horizon Scanning on national policy, and the useful updates on broader ADEPT activity and groups.

There has been a continued strong emphasis on cross cutting themes such as climate change and decarbonisation and levelling up, along with shared organisational challenges such as ongoing budget pressures, recruitment, retention and upskilling. There have been some lively round table discussions and the Board is very inclusive, encouraging a wide range of different views and perspectives. We have also spent time on wellbeing and peer support which continues outside of the meetings. We are keen to attract new members to the North West Board and to broaden our networks.

Angela Jones, Chair of ADEPT North West Board, May 2023

## Yorkshire & Humber Board

The Yorkshire & Humber Board met bi-monthly over the year, and all place directors from across the region are invited to attend. Meetings have included:

- presentations on housing & public sector retrofit
- presentations on the outcomes of the 2022 local elections
- updates from DLUHC on the planning reforms as set out in the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill
- from Defra on implementation of the waste reforms
- from Giles Perkins on the DfT/ADEPT Live Labs 2 programme
- had the download on the negotiations behind the North Yorkshire & York County Devo Deal
- discussed the implications of inflationary pressures and how to tackle the energy crisis
- had an overview from One Public Estate of the brownfield land release fund
- and most recently, discussed with the LGA the government's proposal to integrate LEPs into local democratic institutions.

We are developing a forward plan for future meetings, which includes hearing more about Oflog, planning reforms, active travel and public transport, workforce issues and the net zero agenda – and are always open to other suggestions.

Karl Battersby, Chair of ADEPT Yorkshire & Humber Board, May 2023

## Midlands Board

With a change of Chair in the Midlands, and thanks again to all of the work over the years from Adrian Smith at Nottinghamshire for his leadership and motivation, we develop and grow our approach.

A vice-chair has also recently been cajoled into supporting the Board so thanks to Mary Morrissey at Solihull for taking up this position.

The level of member attendance and quality of debate continues to demonstrate the importance of the Board space for Place Directors to come together to share knowledge and understanding of key issues. Work to develop a forward programme of topics and speakers will hopefully keep the agendas relevant and interesting to all and I continue to encourage people to bring their own contributions to that agenda.

The flux within Government over the last 12 months has made it difficult to have a clear and consistent understanding of the overarching Government policy agenda but we have welcomed representatives from Government Departments who have done their best to provide clarity and direction and hopefully that will become easier in coming months.

Big ticket items which the Board have been briefed on and engaged in stimulating debate include:

- Devolution – lessons learnt and opportunities
- Zero carbon and sustainability – now a standing agenda item on the agenda
- Regional updates from Midlands, Engine and Midlands Connect
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Andy Gutherson, Chair of ADEPT Midlands Board, May 2023

## East of England Board

Chair – Andrew Cook, Suffolk County Council

Vice Chair - Grahame Bygrave, Norfolk County Council

Secretariat – Emma Cook, Suffolk County Council

The East of England regional board continues to meet on a bi-monthly basis with good attendance from all member authorities. The turn of the year saw a change in chairmanship with the outgoing Steve Cox from Cambridgeshire handing over to Andrew Cook from Suffolk. Grahame Bygrave from Norfolk County Council continued as vice-chair.

The meetings tend to be an hour in duration with an equal split between guest presentations and discussion of current issues. During the course of the year, the group has heard from Active Travel England, Defra, past and current ADEPT presidents, together with specific items on devolution activity and passenger transport subsidy.

Member discussion during the meetings covered a range of further topical subject matters including budget implications, funding bids, the levelling up agenda and local government finance.

For enquiries on attendance or presenting, please contact the group secretariat, Emma Cook – [emma.cook@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:emma.cook@suffolk.gov.uk)

Andrew Cook, Chair of ADEPT East of England Board, May 2023

## South West Board

The South West Board met three times, under the new Chair Sophie Broadfield (Director of Sustainable Communities, Bath and North East Somerset Council). Meetings have been structured to include an update from national government, a discussion with a significant regional stakeholder and sharing of regional best practice.

We have had engaging discussions with Defra, the Somerset Waste Partnership, DLUHC, South Gloucestershire's Live Lab bid (transport), Active Travel England, 5G Rural Dorset and the South West Infrastructure Partnership.

We're looking forward to hearing from businesses in our region at our next meeting in July and learning from Bath and North East Somerset's experience of establishing Aequus, an arms-length body to drive housing delivery.

Sophie Broadfield, Chair of ADEPT South West Board, May 2023

## South East Board (SEDEPT)

The board met on 9th March and heard two presentations on public engagement.

Damian Greenfield and Karen Fourie from the Consultation Institute spoke about how to approach engagement in a positive way that could promote behaviour change. Damian cited 3 specific barriers to effective engagement – fragmentation through silos (not working across different disciplines and with partners effectively) through exclusion of businesses and through the fragmentation of communication. There were some specific ideas as to how to overcome these barriers and an acceptance that achieving behaviour change is not easy and that we need to be realistic about the outcomes. Damian emphasised the need to spread engagement across different formats and how the planning and funding of communication is critical to ensure its success.

We also heard from Brian Deegan, director of inspections at Active Travel England (ATE). He spoke about his experience, primarily working with local authorities in delivering active travel initiatives and how this can be successful through close engagement and addressing the specific issues raised. He was joined by Danny Williams (CEO ATE) and a broad discussion on how best to approach engagement in this specific area was had. Overall it was agreed that the bigger issues (climate change, conspiracy theories, etc) need to be avoided and are not related to specific projects and can be distracting. It was great to hear input from Bill Cotton from Oxfordshire County Council where there have been some particularly strong representations regarding their initiatives in this area.

We heard updates from Hannah Bartram on activity at ADEPT.

On 27<sup>th</sup> April SEDEPT hosted a webinar with Defra, Natural England and the Planning Advisory Service relating to local nature recovery strategies (LNRS). This was well attended by authorities across the region and some critical issues were raised around how to engage with supporting authorities, the role of the different organisations in with respect to LNRS and how funding will be maintained in the longer term.

Matt Davey, Co-Chair ADEPT South East Board, May 2023



## Transport and Connectivity Board

At its June 2022 meeting Ann Carruthers, Director of Environment and Transport for Leicestershire County Council, took over as Chair of the Transport & Connectivity Board.

It has been yet another very busy year and with the majority of meetings continuing to be held virtually, attendance has remained high. The Board has held 5 meetings with two additional engagement sessions. Each meeting has focussed on a different theme, ensuring a wide spectrum of interest areas are covered.

The Board has continued to see enthusiastic engagement from members in an inclusive and collaborative way. This has helped the development of a Challenge Paper on road pricing/demand management as well as work to scrutinise national policy proposals and consultations. From the past year there has been a strong emphasis on cross-cutting topics such as: the impacts of inflation on project delivery, national efforts to reach net zero targets, the obstacles in delivering subsidised bus services, DRT and community transport, the future of freight, and the application of data to assess travel demand and smarter investment.

There have been a number of highlights from the work of the Board this year. One came from a Briefing Note produced by the Board feeding into the national conversation on energy and data. ADEPT's commentary was used to inform the Secretary State, and in turn, the Cabinet and helped secure public sector inclusion in the Government's Energy Support Package. Another highlight was the work the Board produced for the DfT regarding the '£2 Bus Fare Cap.' This helped to gain assurances and support passenger transport over the short and medium term following the significant impact the pandemic had on the bus market. Similarly, the Board has been active in feeding into and shaping DfT's forthcoming LTP guidance and wider BSOG and bus funding review work among other topics.

Board members have also helped populate a joint task and finish group with the Association of Directors of Childrens Services on SEN Transport. Both associations are looking to use the output of this work to influence future Government policy and legislation review and to support local transport authorities with a toolkit showcasing options to help manage growth across SEN transport.

Board working groups on Road Safety, Rights of Way, Digital Connectivity, Traffic Systems and National Traffic Managers Forum continue to be active and update the Board on key topics.

Ann would like to thank Hannah Bartram and Edward Shortridge, Associate for WSP for their continued work and support over the last year helping to make the T&C Board a valuable and productive group.

Ann Carruthers, Chair of ADEPT Transport & Connectivity Board, May 2023

## Engineering Board

Engineering Board Chair – Mark Stevens (Haringey Council)

Deputy Chair – James Bailey (Staffordshire County Council)

Secretary – Kathryn Moreton (Walsall Council)

Having tackled and come through the turbulence of Covid-19 and everything that has thrown at us, the Engineering Board has had a year of addressing the consequences of the war in Ukraine, the consequential impact on supply of goods (with some inordinately lengthened delivery times), significant energy price hikes (meaning spiralling street lighting energy costs crippling revenue budgets), highways sector instability (in some cases, where the price fluctuation factor clauses created for moderate inflation changes no longer provide financial reassurance to the contractor), the cost of living crisis and major projects that have had to fall by the wayside as they became unaffordable with no central government financial lifeline. Whilst solving problems may well be engrained in the DNA of engineers, it's been a testing year!

There has been a distinct focus on green issues over the four meetings of the Board, reflecting the growing need to consider the impact of climate change. In July 2022, there was an update on the 'Treeconomics/Value of Trees' project being progressed at Leicestershire County Council. The update was timely given the announcement shortly afterwards (in August) of the Levelling Up Parks Fund and the recognition of the importance of green canopies in urban environments for both heat reduction and air quality improvement. This prompted discussion about parklets (converting on-road parking space to small green spaces) and pocket parks (adapting hard landscaping in the highway to green space potentially maintained by the local community), in tandem with reflecting on the urban meadows approach from a previous meeting. All of that was considered in conjunction with the update the Board received in the meeting about Manual for Streets 3 – something that we still await. But patience is often the key and attendees also debated finally getting the long-awaited enactment of Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004, at long last allowing the enforcement by local highway authorities of moving traffic offences outside of London.

Even when MfS3 does emerge, it was recognised there will still be gaps and variances. Engineers also like certainty, though - the parameters that help define the space in which a solution has to be found. So, much of the October 2022 meeting was focused on the particular gap between Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and the Manual for Streets 2 – good old number-crunching, consideration of angles, time and distance when looking at the alternative approaches to determining appropriate visibility splays. But sometimes parameters can be too rigid and no-one was happy with the seemingly dogmatic approach being taken by National Highways with its stance on requiring local highway authorities to provide surety for any highway scheme that might impact on its network. Members of the Engineering Board don't necessarily hold a grudge but many recalled the protracted negotiation with Highways England regarding maintenance responsibilities at the boundaries between the two networks. Although National Highways changed its stance on the surety issue, many Board members were reticent to believe that leopard has permanently changed its spots.

Given the difficulties associated with 'human resource management' – or, more colloquially, getting 'bums on seats' – the January 2023 meeting was upbeat. Why? Well, the government had announced that £32.9m was being made available to local authorities to train engineers and planners to conduct high-quality engagement and consultation sessions with local communities – all

tied in with Active Travel England's work and intentions. The idea that we would get help to achieve modal shift wasn't quite the equivalent of a New Year's resolution – but it had promise that 2023 would be different from a funding perspective. And the help for decarbonisation kept coming when the Board heard about the 'Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure' (LEVI) scheme, aiming to "encourage large scale, ambitious and commercially sustainable projects that leverage significant private sector investment". More money? Could this be true? With gusto, a discussion followed regarding the challenges of providing EV charging facilities on-street – but viewed in a more positive way with pound signs flashing in people's eyes. But the pound signs began to fade and be replaced with warning signs when hearing about the feasibility of a trial for longer/heavier vehicles (LHVs) on roads in Great Britain. Our poor bridges. Whatever next?!?! Well, that was the £200m pothole fund to help patch up our beleaguered roads across the country – except London, of course. With the maintenance backlog rising significantly to an all-time high according to the 2023 Asphalt Alliance's ALARM survey, anything was better than nothing.

So, avoiding unnecessary costs just had to be talked about. That came in the April 2023 Engineering Board meeting, hearing about the National Underground Asset Register, putting the detail of what lies hidden to most into a digital format to avoid 60,000 accidental strikes to buried pipes and cables across the UK and costing an estimated £2.4bn a year. The very same amount of investment needed each year for highway maintenance – before the war in Ukraine set the inflation ball rolling of course. But, if that Register works and stops public utilities breaking our gully connections and such like, it has to be a good thing – provided we've worked out where they are and have added them to the Register in the first place! At least we know where we stand with our carriageways, footways and footpaths. Whilst the Engineering Board's attention shifts more and more to the environment, it was discomfoting to hear of a Lands Tribunal case where lawyers defending an adverse possession (i.e., illegal land grab) were suggesting the adjacent soft landscape wasn't really highway after all. We'll await the judge's view on that one.

All-in-all, the shift to four meetings a year has worked well. Attendance is high – suggesting that virtual meetings are here to stay. And let's face it, it has to be more environmentally friendly to sit in front of a screen for a few hours than many potentially spending an entire day travelling to and from an in-person meeting from across the country. Great to know that the Engineering Board is doing its bit to save the planet, in more ways than one!

Mark Stevens, Chair of ADEPT Engineering Board, May 2023

## Environment Board

It has been a very busy and high-profile year for the Environment Board. I took over as Chair after the meeting in January 2023 so the first thing to say is a big thank you to my predecessor Steve Read who had done the job with such commitment, understanding and good humour. Steve retired from his day job at West Sussex County Council in March and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours. And a big thank you too to Tracey Butcher who as Secretary to the Board gave great service in supporting Steve and keeping the Board well-informed and running smoothly through all the challenges of the last 3 years and the lack of in-person contact.

Our agenda for the year has been driven by the implementation of various aspects of the Environment Act 2021 and the government's updated Environmental Improvement Plan 2023. While we support the ambitions set out in law and the EIP and are committed to the local delivery of those elements requiring local leadership and action, we are frustrated that progress by government has been slow and patchy – not helped by the national political situation in 2022 that saw repeated ministerial and policy changes. There have been long waits for government responses to consultation and the publication of secondary legislation and statutory guidance in relation to nature recovery, biodiversity, waste & recycling, and flood risk management. Funding announcements have been late in the day and not helpful in terms of the conditions set out. Local authorities have been hampered by this and by the operational difficulties caused by delay and uncertainty.

The Board had main meetings each quarter with shorter catch-up meetings most other months, all virtual. For the quarterly meetings we usually have guest speakers on current topics, these have included:

- Richard Brockington, Office for Environmental Protection – monitoring the government's 25 Year Environment Plan
- Sophie Tyldesley, Defra – nature skills and green jobs
- Robert Mason, Defra – national adaptation programme
- Wildlife & Countryside Link – equality, diversity and inclusion in the environment workforce
- Grace Abel, Local Government Association – LGA's climate support programme for councils
- Andrew Jackson and Lucy Hancock, Defra – the EIP 2023
- Gayle Monk, Anthony Collins Solicitors – extended biodiversity duty; the Retained EU Law Bill.

As well as our local authority members we welcome regular attendance and updates from colleagues at Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency, these are always valuable. The Board continues to have four active Working Groups – Energy & Clean Growth, Flood & Water Management, Natural Capital & Heritage, and Waste. It's great that Sheryl French has taken over from me as Chair of the Energy & Clean Growth group. Many thanks to Max Tant, Liz Milne & Liz Small, and Steve Palfrey respectively who continue to chair the other groups. Steve is also now the Deputy Chair of the Board.

We responded to many government consultations over the past year including:

- Nature Recovery Green Paper (May 2022)
- Green Finance Strategy Review (June 2022)
- Charging for DIY waste at household recycling centres (July 2022)
- Net Zero Review – Skidmore (October 2022)

- Air Quality Strategy (April 2023).

Other activities to mention are giving evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees including the House of Lords Built Environment Committee inquiry into environmental protection and development (March 2023); workshops with Defra on the Protected Landscapes Review (National Parks and AONBs); a webinar in March 2023 on the forthcoming Land Use Framework; regional webinars with Defra, Natural England and PAS on the roll out of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (April/May 2023).

Finally, Sheryl and I are pleased to be on ADEPT's new Climate Change Board which is just getting off the ground as described in the latest newsletter and [blog](#).

Carolyn McKenzie, Chair of ADEPT Environment Board, May 2023