



# PLACING COMMUNITIES FIRST

Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026

# ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

# PEOPLE, PLACE AND PLANET

## A good sense of place: creating resilient communities in a time of change

**The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of place directors in local authorities. We develop, support and represent our members to make their places more resilient, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous.**

Place directors are at the very heart of place-shaping, delivering universal services and leading partnerships to support their local environment, economy and communities. They are responsible for providing day-to-day services such as local highways, waste and recycling, and planning as well as developing the longer-term strategies, investment and infrastructure needed to make their places resilient, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous. Place is where things get done. Place directors deliver solutions locally.

### **ADEPT supports its members to do this by:**

- Building strong collaborative relationships with government, public agencies, corporate and commercial partners, and a wide range of professional and NGO organisations.
- Networking, learning and research and development to drive innovation and share best practice.
- Providing high quality leadership development, thought leadership and training programmes.
- Influencing and policy development to make the case for joined-up policies across government, improved funding for local authorities, and greater devolution of powers and investment.





# ABOUT ADEPT

**ADEPT represents place directors from county, unitary and combined authorities. We also represent directors of Local Enterprise Partnerships, sub-national transport bodies, corporate partners drawn from key service sectors throughout England along with affiliate members from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.**

Our members are place-making strategists and policy shapers, delivering the universal frontline services we all use, ensuring ever limited resources are deployed effectively to support our communities and create vibrant, sustainable places. They are responsible for providing day-to-day services including local highways, waste and recycling, economic regeneration and planning, as well as developing the long-term strategies to deliver thriving places - and managing the interplay between these different time horizons.

ADEPT members are at the very heart of delivering clean, sustainable growth, and tackling climate change at a local level. They manage the projects and programmes that are fundamental to creating more resilient, inclusive and safe communities, economies and infrastructure. They operate in diverse places with differing challenges - urban and rural, coastal and inland, connected and remote.

ADEPT is a proactive network that supports members, develops leaders and delivers policy, research, challenge papers and guidance. Our greatest strength lies in our networks, bridging the gap between local and national governments, public and private sectors. We operate across boundaries, not within silos, bringing partners together to shape, plan and integrate our places and communities.

At a time of unprecedented political, environmental, financial and social pressures, this document sets out our proposed roadmap over the next three years, building on our current core themes of people, place and planet. Aimed at existing and potential ADEPT members, partners and other stakeholder groups, it outlines our key strategic objectives and the actions we have planned.



# OVERVIEW

**We continue to live in a rapidly changing world. In the post-Brexit, post-pandemic and high inflation landscape we face exceptional economic, financial, political and climate challenges.**

Local authorities have risen to the challenge of supporting their communities and vulnerable people through the challenges of recent years. However, the current cost of living crisis, the high cost of energy, pressures on the health and social care sectors, and skills and workforce shortages are all having a direct and significant impact on local authorities and the services they deliver. Global issues are also impacting, including continuing supply chain issues and impacts from the war in Ukraine.

In particular, the acute financial pressures facing local authorities are colossal and increasing. With gaping budget gaps and borrowing constraints at an all-time high, the biggest challenge for local authorities will be maintaining the capacity and capability to continue to function. Without certainty of adequate future revenue funding and a shift away from competitive bidding for capital funding pots, it is unlikely that place services will be delivered at the existing standard or that councils will be able to pump prime economic regeneration that attracts private sector investment. There is also a need for new funding mechanisms to promote behaviour change and to compensate for any changes to the taxation system.

It is important to note however, that some of these challenges may also create opportunity to refocus and reframe our purpose - in a sustained period of flux there is often scope to review and consolidate so that we may become more resilient and ensure we remain relevant to our members.

Despite many of these factors being outside our direct sphere of influence, we must still enable effective responses to their impact. From new political leadership to the next general election, there is potential to influence government priorities, inform and educate stakeholders and equip our communities to become more resilient. Understanding the changing priorities for our communities is key and so new approaches to how we plan, resource and fund to enable growth and change in a sustainable way will become increasingly important.

This document will be a framework to guide ADEPT's work over the coming three years, during which time there will be a general election. The current political, environmental, social and economic context is turbulent and liable to change. We want to influence that change for good, helping communities and government adapt to the challenges ahead.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

**The last ADEPT strategic plan, published just before the pandemic in 2019, set out our short, medium and long-term objectives.**

Due to the impact of the pandemic, the pace of achieving some of these objectives was accelerated, to our benefit. Our response has meant much closer collaboration and has led to stronger, enhanced networks and partnerships. We now wish to build on these achievements.

**Some of our key successes have included:**

## Collaboration

**ADEPT has endeavoured to build on and develop our collaborative work. We have worked with partners and sister organisations in local government on a number of high-profile issues to help influence government, shape future policy and set up projects and programmes.**

This includes the Blueprint Coalition, an influential coalition of local government organisations, environmental groups and research institutions, set up to show how the government can accelerate climate action at the local level. We established a joint presidents' group bringing together our fellow professional organisations of ADASS, ADCS, ADPH and the LGA. We regularly host Chatham House discussions with key government departments and bodies such as the NAO and NIC on emerging policy and research. Our corporate partners bring strength and depth to our thinking. We have supported our members through the challenges of the pandemic and inflation, so we know that one of the things they most value about ADEPT is the networking and peer support.

## Projects

**ADEPT has developed a number of projects including the two-year, £22.9m Live Labs 1 programme, funded by the Department for Transport, to examine the opportunities and challenges facing the adoption of digital technology and innovation across the local highway network.**

Building on this success, in April 2022 DfT announced Live Labs 2, with £30m of funding for a new three-year, UK-wide programme focusing on the decarbonisation of local highways infrastructure and assets. We jointly commissioned the report 'Levelling up for people and place' in partnership with our fellow professional organisations and delivered a programme of joint green finance webinars with CIFPA. The Spring and Autumn Conferences, plus the national traffic managers conference, are highlights of the ADEPT calendar.

## Programmes

**One of our core beliefs is that creating an environment for change demands fresh thinking - we recognise that developing the leaders of the future is critical in overcoming many of the challenges outlined above.**

With this in mind, we have created two highly successful programmes, aimed at developing influential leaders and thinkers: the Excellence in Place Leadership Programme in partnership with Amey and the ADEPT Leadership Development Programme (LDP) with SOLACE. Over 100 people have now completed the LDP. We continue to grow our learning and development offer. We deliver the Future Highways Research Group in partnership with Proving Services, now with over 35 members. We have established commercial partnerships with the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency.

# OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS FOR 2023 - 2026

## **Making the case for place has never been more vital.**

Local communities need long-term strategic objectives that look forward to the next 20-30 years underpinned by funding certainty, innovation and flexibility.

Our strategic objectives for the next three years align with our three areas of focus - people, place and planet. We recognise that these themes are inextricably linked with one another, so there is inevitably some overlap, meaning the themes need to be aligned and working together.

We also recognise that current economic, environmental and resource constraints mean there is even greater potential for collaboration and working in tandem with partners to develop more efficient and effective policy at a local level, devolving real power to our communities rather than the centralised model of previous years.

Our Strategic Plan for 2023-26 has six priorities. The first four of these are outward-looking towards the wider policy objectives that we will help shape and achieve. The last two are more people-focused and inward-looking towards the place workforce, and also inwards to our members and our organisation, aiming to develop stronger professionals and improved support for place directors.

## **1. Ensuring resilience in local government structures and governance**

ADEPT will champion the role of place to government and support members to ensure the right powers and funding are devolved to local authorities, to address local disparities and improve local infrastructure. We want to see:

- Integrated proposals on climate, net zero and the environment embedded into devolution deals and local infrastructure planning.
- A long-term investment programme that gives greater certainty to local partners and potential private investors and provides a firm basis for stimulating demand for green skills and jobs.

## **2. Levelling up for people and place**

Levelling up offers a real opportunity to ensure multiple outcomes across the key areas of environment, economy, social inequality and health and wellbeing. Local authorities are uniquely well placed to deliver levelling up for people and places. Our members provide the local leadership and understanding of place to ensure a better understanding of place. We want to see:

- The levelling up and growth agenda retaining a focus on inclusion and improving wellbeing amongst the most vulnerable in society. There is also an imperative to address the wider determinants of ill-health linked to social, economic and environmental factors.
- A streamlined and simplified funding landscape that promotes and develops green financing<sup>1</sup>, and a more effective and sustainable infrastructure funding mechanism within the planning system.

<sup>1</sup> Green financing is to increase level of financial flows (from banking, micro-credit, insurance and investment) from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to sustainable development priorities (as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme).

### 3. Delivering green growth

A strong economy and a strong environment go hand in hand, with plenty of evidence of the economic benefits of climate and environmental ambitions. Local authorities are committed to protecting and restoring nature, delivering the key goals of the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, and delivering a net zero economy in support of the UK's targets. They see the opportunities to tackle social disparities between and within their places at the same time. We want to see:

- The government prioritising green growth, including its commitment to delivering 440,000 green jobs.
- Critical protections for the environment and heritage retained.

### 4. Taking action on climate change

The UK's legally binding carbon reduction targets can only be reached with the contribution of local authorities working at the local level. Properly empowered and resourced local authorities working with a wide variety of partners within their areas - including local people, businesses, community and voluntary groups - can deliver the necessary carbon reductions, improve climate resilience and help levelling up. We want to see:

- A place-based approach - underpinned by co-ordinated leadership, support and resource from central government - where the net zero agenda runs through every strategy, policy and delivery plan, reducing emissions now and avoiding the need for costly remedial action at a later date.
- Action taken now to make places more resilient to the already changing climate.

### 5. Our most valuable asset is our people

There are significant workforce and skills shortages across the country. Employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors are all reporting a lack of people to fill key roles, hampering delivery. Staff retention within local authorities is an issue. Improving the diversity of the public sector workforce remains critical, along with developing the skills that we need over the next ten years to deliver place services. We want to see:

- Working in 'place' as the career of choice.
- A pipeline of diverse place and thought leaders of the future.

### 6. Being the best we can be

ADEPT is the voice of place directors in local authorities. We support our members by building strong collaborative partnerships, facilitating networking and research, providing high quality development opportunities and influencing policy development. We want to be the best we can, by continuing to be relevant to place directors and help them to bring forward talent from their teams. We want to be:

- An organisation that is representative, inclusive, trusted, respected and influential and that maximises the impact of its valued relationships with corporate and commercial partners.
- An organisation that drives innovation and best practice.



## SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR 2023-24

The annual work plan is available [here](#).

- **Networking and learning** - to enhance the delivery & impact of our Regional and Subject Boards and working groups; maintain strategic engagement with key government departments and agencies plus other relevant organisations (Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4).
- **Influencing and policy development** - look to securing sufficient, multi-year funding for place-based services; update our policy position and challenge papers; establish a Climate Change Board and continue to work with the Local Net Zero Forum and LAAP (Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4).
- **Workforce development** - with our corporate partners, develop programmes to tackle recruitment and retention challenges within the sector and to improve equality, diversity and inclusivity within the place workforce (Objective 5).
- **To continue to offer excellent membership services** - to further grow our membership, offer quality training and development programmes, and build our commercial partnerships (Objectives 5 and 6).
- **To develop a specific offer targeted at Executive Directors** (Objectives 5 and 6).
- **Research and development** - to use the Live Labs 2 model to establish ADEPT as leading the way in implementing innovation in the highways sector and others (Objective 6).
- **Organisational development** - act on the recommendations of an independent review of our members' perceptions to add more value and improve access to all ADEPT has to offer; increase the Secretariat staffing/capacity including the creation of a new Deputy CEO role (Objective 6).





**ADEPT's members are the place-making strategists and policy shapers across county, unitary, metropolitan, combined authorities and sub-national transport bodies.**

- ADEPT's members work at the heart of their communities to deliver vibrant, healthy and sustainable places.
- ADEPT's members design strategies for the future, cutting through boundaries to work with partners across the political, public, private and community sectors.
- ADEPT's members are specialists, delivering services and sharing best practice across key sectors including environment, planning, housing, transport and economy.
- ADEPT works with corporate partners in the private sector and other key stakeholders to focus our activities and maximise our impact.
- ADEPT provides a wide range of services, research and development, influencing, networking and learning opportunities to encourage new talent and ensure our members' continuing professional development.

**[www.adeptnet.org.uk](http://www.adeptnet.org.uk)**

# ADEPT

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