

# ADEPT


Association of Directors of  
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport



## Environment Board quarterly meeting

20 January 2026

Attendees:		Action Owner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carolyn McKenzie – Chair</li> <li>• Eliza Alqassar</li> <li>• Sarah Bentley</li> <li>• William Boardman</li> <li>• Claire Brailsford</li> <li>• Quinton Carroll</li> <li>• David Dale</li> <li>• Tim De-Keyzer</li> <li>• Ian Fenn</li> <li>• Sarah Gilbert</li> <li>• Henry Gilliver</li> <li>• Hannah Hyland</li> <li>• Ralph Kemp</li> </ul> <p>Kristi Nicholls – note taker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sam Kennedy</li> <li>• Olawale Ladapo</li> <li>• Kate Langdown</li> <li>• Mark Minkley</li> <li>• Rob Murfin</li> <li>• Steven O'Keeffe</li> <li>• Steve Palfrey</li> <li>• Chris Rowett</li> <li>• Kylie Russell</li> <li>• Yasmin Shah</li> <li>• Adam Stewart</li> <li>• Lynn Trigwell</li> <li>• Mike Webb</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b> CMcK welcomed everyone to the meeting <a href="#">Recap: ADEPT Environment Board Quarterly meeting 20 January   Meeting   Microsoft Teams</a></p>		
<p><b><u>Environmental Improvement Plan EIP25 – Ian Fenn from Defra</u></b></p> <p>Ian's presentation focused on the Government's evolving framework of environmental goals, the ongoing revision of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), and the role of local government in contributing to delivery. Participants discussed strategic continuity, stakeholder engagement, and the need to clarify responsibilities at local and national levels.</p> <p>The Government's environmental framework comprises ten overarching goals, with restoring nature as the primary priority.</p> <p>Other major themes include waste reduction, biosecurity improvement, and strengthening environmental resilience.</p> <p>Despite changes in Government, participants emphasised the need for a consistent strategic thread across successive plans (25 Year Environment Plan → 2023 EIP → new revision).</p> <p>The next scheduled EIP remains due in 2028, in line with the established long-term planning cycle.</p> <p>A recently published EIP Delivery Report (to March 2025) does not yet reflect the current revision but provides useful commentary on progress, emerging needs and urgency.</p> <p>The Department commissioned the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to provide independent advice on the revision.</p> <p>Extensive engagement was carried out with stakeholders including ADEPT, the Local Government Association, NGOs, farmers and industry representatives.</p> <p>Ministerial views were incorporated to ensure alignment with wider Government missions, including the contribution of the natural environment to economic growth.</p> <p>A key intention of the revision is to provide clearer guidance on roles, responsibilities and accountability in achieving environmental targets.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> The Environment Board seeks to clarify local government's role within the revised EIP. Priority themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporation of environmental priorities into spatial development strategies.</li> <li>• Alignment with investment and financial frameworks.</li> <li>• Recognition of natural capital as essential infrastructure.</li> </ul> <p>Within a short timeframe, should aim to distil this work into a set of defined priorities, specifying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authorities' contributions.</li> <li>• Their responsibilities.</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with wider strategies.</li> </ul> <p>Carolyn McKenzie highlighted the need to support strategic authorities, especially amid ongoing local government reorganisation, through a consistent framework or “hook” to ensure continuity. Requirement for a programme of further workshops/sessions to progress detailed work.</p> <p>Ian Fenn emphasised that several of the existing tools and policies, such as LNRS and BNG, will continue to play a significant role in shaping delivery at both national and local levels. He reaffirmed Defra’s intention to maintain the strategic dialogue already established with ADEPT and others. This high-level group will continue to act as an important strategic voice in guiding how the plan works for local government.</p> <p>He added that, should ADEPT wish to explore specific policies, tools or thematic areas in greater depth, Defra would aim to organise and facilitate additional sessions. These could be arranged with the appropriate specialist teams within Defra, rather than relying solely on the central team responsible for the overarching plan.</p> <p>This exchange underscored Defra’s commitment to supporting ADEPT’s need for continued structured engagement, both strategically and at a more operational, policy-specific level, as work progresses on defining local authorities’ role in delivering the EIP.</p>	
<p><b><u>Place based delivery pathfinders – Henry Gilliver &amp; Yasmin Shah from Defra</u></b></p> <p>The Pathfinder Programme was developed following Dan Corry’s external review of Defra’s regulatory landscape. Heather Hancock’s internal review on improving Defra Group delivery. The core objective is to test how Defra Group and its arm’s-length bodies can operate more cohesively to deliver place-based environmental, nature, planning and growth outcomes. The programme aims to create a blueprint for convening stakeholders, improving funding flexibility, and enabling multi-outcome delivery (“more bang for our buck”).</p> <p>Objective is to improve the customer experience of interacting with Defra and its ALBs as a coherent group. Explore whether delivery responsibilities could be better aligned or convened across organisations.</p> <p>Generate recommendations for how Defra delivery bodies can work more effectively together.</p> <p>Combined Authority Pathfinders (all four now launched): West Midlands Combined Authority, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West of England Combined Authority.</p> <p>National Parks Authority discussions with South Downs &amp; Lake District NP at early stages.</p> <p>Defra is working with Local Partnerships to identify opportunities for further devolution that could enhance delivery of Defra outcomes.</p> <p>The work builds on commitments in the English Devolution White Paper, including empowering strategic authorities to support delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).</p> <p>The aim is to understand where wider devolution and place-based approaches could support key priorities set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and broader Defra objectives. Local Partnerships have produced an initial longlist of devolution options, informed by local expertise and a prioritisation exercise will follow, to determine which options are most valuable to take forward eg Floods and water, Rural and circular economy.</p> <p>Carolyn McKenzie said the principles and broad direction are clear, but the detailed proposals and scope need further definition before they can fully understand them. If it would be useful to take this work into ADEPT roundtables or workshops, Carolyn McKenzie said ADEPT would be happy to facilitate targeted sessions with ADEPT already running similar discussions with Natural England, the Department for Transport and others and willing to support this.</p> <p>Steve Palfrey asked would this piece of work lead to a change in the position given Local Government has no statutory duties or dedicated funding for Environment &amp; Climate work. Yasmin Shah replied cannot predict outcome but remain open and positive and provide clarity soon. Aware of risks raised from stakeholders.</p> <p>David Dale confirmed it’s the ADEPT Leadership Team meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January. Jo Wall &amp; Ben Boswell from Local Partnerships will be joining to talk more about the work that Defra has commissioned them to do and how ADEPT can engage.</p> <p>Action: to chairs of ADEPT working groups (Waste, Nature &amp; Flooding) to contact Ben Boswell to get involved.</p> <p>Action for all: Carolyn McKenzie will join the Leadership Team meeting on 29 January. If there is anything from your areas that you feel has not been captured, please e-mail Carolyn directly to ensure it is raised.</p> <p>David Dale reiterated that some of your chief executives are already being invited to the workshops and roundtables. Please ensure your CEOs and place directors take up these opportunities and engage fully.</p> <p>David Dale asked Henry Gilliver: Given that this work is primarily internal to inform recommendations to</p>	<p>Doug Hill, Steve Palfrey &amp; Tim De Keyzer</p> <p>All</p> <p>All</p>

<p>the Secretary of State, is there a way for you to share the insights and learning from the Pathfinders with the wider group, rather than keeping it solely as an in-house exercise?</p> <p>There is a risk that wide consultation results in a long “wish list” of requested powers. It will be more effective to show how devolution could address specific blockers or delivery challenges, and to consider strategic packages of responsibilities that create combined benefits, rather than devolving many isolated functions. Proposals framed in this way are likely to be more compelling to ministers.</p> <p>On sharing learning from the Pathfinders, although this is primarily internal work to inform recommendations to the Secretary of State. Defra are already identifying useful insights—particularly about where strategic authorities can genuinely add value as a relatively new tier of government, and where their role may be less suitable.</p> <p>David Dale confirmed that this group would be happy to test ideas or share early conclusions before taking them further.</p>	
<p><b><u>LNRS delivery and nature finance – view from the West Midlands – Mike Webb from West Midlands Combined Authority</u></b></p> <p> WMCA ADEPT slides Jan 26.pdf</p> <p>Steven O’Keeffe from Cumberland Council asked if the regional habitat bank is owned, led by Combined Authority or through constituent authorities!?</p> <p>Mike Webb said given the local authority’s roles in consenting, planning and supplying the compensation system, which need to align. They are currently developing a business case and reviewing structures. Looking at one-share-per-authority approach, but unsure how will be divvied up. Mike &amp; Steven to catch up offline and perhaps useful for all any findings to share.</p> <p>David Dale asked Mike Webb for his thoughts on role of strategic authorities in nature delivery going forward and tips for colleagues.</p> <p>Carolyn McKenzie asked about land ownership for nature recovery purposes as a combined authority. Mike confirmed land assets are focused on an end issue that aren’t nature. Big push for brownfield habitats and they have published context study and produced a design guide. <a href="#">Technical Resources</a> - Link to WMCA guidance – BNG implementation &amp; Brownfield reports</p> <p>Eliza Alqassar asked about the investment hub and how the projects arrive? Mike confirmed they come from the LINC programme. Adam Stewart confirmed that there are plans from EA/Defra teams responsible for LINC to publish a series of 'how to' guides on different topics, learning from LINC. Adam confirmed Defra will share these when available.</p> <p>Action: David Dale to note. ADEPT may want to follow up on the green finance points? ADEPT has already looked at green finance with current significant activity around nature finance that should be picked up on.</p>	<p>Mike Webb &amp; Steven O’Keeffe</p> <p>David Dale</p>
<p><b><u>Updates from Partners</u></b></p> <p><b>Defra – Olawale Ladapo</b> <b>Action:</b> Share an updated structure diagram or a brief outlining who the directors are and their responsibilities.</p> <p>David Dale asked regarding a Water White Paper has been published today (20 Jan). ADEPT has previously discussed holding a joint meeting of this board with the Economy, Planning and Housing Board to consider the White Paper and any potential ADEPT response. <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-biggest-overhaul-to-water-in-a-generation">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-biggest-overhaul-to-water-in-a-generation</a> <a href="#">A new vision for water: white paper - GOV.UK</a></p> <p>Action: Ola to investigate deadline for comments and submissions on the Water White Paper and revert to David Dale / ADEPT</p> <p><b>Environment Agency – Christopher Rowett</b> We are undertaking a Planning Service Transformation Project to redesign and modernise how we provide spatial planning advice across England. The aim is to make the service more predictable, transparent, evidence-informed and supportive of sustainable development. Currently in the discovery phase to run until March. In contact with LPAs, councillors, developers and partners to identify what works well or improvements. ADEPT members’ insights are important so we will circulate a link for colleagues who wish to take part in interviews or share feedback. Re BNG, PAS will publish an advice note next week on BNG and planning application site boundaries. It has been produced with support from EA, PAS, LPA practitioners and MHCLG. We will share the link when available. The EA and Ofwat are inviting colleagues to the Partnership Working Roadshow, aimed at strengthening collaboration across the water and environmental sectors. These free workshops, suitable for those new</p>	<p>Olawale Ladapo</p> <p>Olawale Ladapo</p>

<p>to partnership working, will take place from 10–12 February in Bristol, Birmingham and London.</p> <p><b>Natural England –</b> No verbal update. Attached is the recording for the joint series of webinars with ADEPT &amp; Natural England</p>  <p>ADEPT &amp; NE webinar_Nature Restc</p> <p>The next webinar is 10 March about the launch of the Natural England EXPLORE Framework - a practical, applied and evidence-based framework for integrated planning and decision-making. It is designed to support strategic conversations across health, wellbeing, nature and sustainability, helping local government teams address complex challenges in a systemic way. A registration link will be circulated.</p>	
<p><b><u>Update from working groups:</u></b></p> <p><b>Energy &amp; Clean Growth – Daire Casey</b> N/A</p> <p><b>Flood &amp; Water Management – Doug Hill / Kylie Russell</b> A meeting with Defra happened to discuss surface water management. Follow up meeting planned. Meeting with MHCLG re National Flood Recovery framework which Doug Hill &amp; Victoria Coombs attended. Received an update from the Environment Agency on the Adaptation Pathways Project in Yorkshire, which is focusing on surface-water issues. They also outlined some of their work on skills development. Discussion on recent reports, next steps, including NPPF.</p> <p><b>Natural Capital &amp; Heritage – Tim De-Keyzer</b> Attended NC&amp;H group meeting on 19 January – see notes attached.</p>  <p>NC&amp;Hnotes190126.d ocx</p> <p><b>Waste – Steve Palfrey</b> The next meeting of the Waste Working Group is on 28 January. It will focus on decarbonisation, including the inclusion of waste in the Emissions Trading Scheme and work on carbon-intensive materials such as textiles and persistent organic pollutants. Please ensure your waste teams attend – let Steve know if they want to be added on mailing list.</p> <p>Packaging payments are now being released. Local authorities have received their Q1 and Q2 payments for 2025/26, and Q3 payments are expected this month. We are still awaiting publication of the Circular Economy Growth Plan published, which is anticipated in mid-February.</p> <p>Ralph Kemp asked if the revenue elements of the Food Waste Grant have they been communicated for weekly food waste collections? Steve answered that as food-waste payments were included in the overall local government settlement allocated to MHCLG for 2026/27 and passed on to authorities as part of that settlement. Government is <b>not</b> identifying a separate, itemised amount for food-waste new-burdens funding. This revenue funding for collection authorities (districts, boroughs and unitaries) is therefore embedded within the settlement rather than shown as a distinct figure. Unsurprisingly, this has caused frustration for authorities that expected a clear, identifiable allocation to confirm their costs were covered. Although the funding is reportedly included, the lack of transparency means authorities cannot evidence it, which has undermined confidence and created understandable concern.</p>	All
<p><b>ADEPT Business</b> <b>Transport / Infrastructure</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Public Accounts Committee is holding an inquiry into <b>home to school transport</b>. Likely topics for scrutiny include how to manage rising demand; available support for young people; and efforts to contain costs. ADEPT has submitted written evidence and on 8<sup>th</sup> December Rose McArthur, chair of the ADEPT H2S transport working group, gave oral evidence – you can watch the session <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li><b>Carbon Leadership Programme:</b> There's been significant interest in the <a href="#">programme</a> since we launched it in June, and places are limited for the remainder of the 2025/26 programme. This is a fully funded programme, supported by the Department for Transport, designed to help local highway authorities save money and increase efficiencies by measuring and identifying how to reduce carbon emissions. Rather than each authority investing considerable time and resources into developing its own carbon baselining tool and working in isolation with limited visibility of comparative performance, the programme offers a coordinated approach. Another training session is planned for the 27<sup>th</sup> January – see <a href="#">here</a> to register.</li> <li><b>Live Labs 2:</b> We have launched a pledge that invites stakeholders to drive meaningful</li> </ol>	

decarbonisation across all aspects of the UK's road network and rethink how the highways infrastructure reduces carbon – for more information and to sign the pledge, see [here](#). The second webinar for pledge signatories will take place 9-10am on 28<sup>th</sup> January, and will focus on the outputs and outcomes emerging from the East Riding Live Labs project and the Centre of Excellence for Decarbonising Roads (Transport for West Midlands), covering efficiency savings, new ways of delivering essential services and core carbon savings in street lighting and highway pavement repair and maintenance. Webinar No 3 will take place from 9-10am on 25<sup>th</sup> March. If you would to attend either / both webinars, please email [Damon McVeigh](mailto:Damon.McVeigh@east-sussex.gov.uk). The latest blog is from Transport for West Midlands ([here](#)).

**Devolution / Growth / Planning**

4. We responded to the **Autumn Statement** – see [here](#).
5. We have published a policy position paper on the **Devolution Bill** ([here](#)). Whilst we welcomed the introduction of the Bill, and the opportunity it presents for strengthening local leadership and place-based service delivery, we are very disappointed that the Bill does not propose to transfer or introduce new statutory environmental or climate-related functions to Strategic Authorities. The Bill has just completed the report stage in the House of Commons and will move onto the House of Lords next.
6. The next Lunch & Learn – taking place 12-1245pm on Weds 28 January – is an opportunity to join last year's **PACE Programme** cohort as they talk through the issues and topics covered by the programme, exploring how global megatrends are reshaping the landscape of local governance; examining the evolving political, economic and social landscape in Wales reflecting on the broader implications for England and the wider UK; and leading place through political and investment change. To register, please contact the [secretariat](#).

**Environment / Climate**

7. We responded to the publication in December of the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework ([here](#)).
8. In the most recent **climate change blog**, Angela Jones, ADEPT President and Director of Thriving Places for Westmorland & Furness Council reflects on 2025, a year of transition for climate action in local government and looks ahead to what 2026 may bring.
9. On 20<sup>th</sup> January colleagues from Defra attended the Environment Board to brief on the long-awaited revised **Environmental Improvement Plan** that was published in December 2025 -see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/a-greener-and-more-prosperous-future-with-new-environmentalimprovementplan>.

**Events/Other**

10. We are celebrating ADEPT's 140th anniversary year by showcasing the voices of past and present Presidents, reflecting on the evolution of place leadership and exploring the challenges, innovations and aspirations shaping the future of the sector. We'll be publishing one essay a month over the anniversary year. Next in the series is the essay on place leadership and planning by Anthony Payne, Past President of ADEPT (2023-24) and former Place Director of Plymouth City Council. You can read Anthony's essay [here](#).
11. **Dates for your diary** – for more detail please visit the Events page on the website ([here](#)):
  - The next in the series of webinars with the Environment Agency takes place on 29 January, 2-3pm and will focus on building resilience and empowering communities through social innovation in flood risk management for more information contact [Kylie.Russell@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Kylie.Russell@eastsussex.gov.uk)
  - The Spring Conference, AGM and Annual Awards Dinner will be held in London on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026. Transport Minister Simon Lightwood is confirmed as the headline speaker.

**AOB**

Next meeting (1 hour) – 25 February at 2pm  
 Contact David Dale if you wish to highlight hot topics or any agenda items.  
**Close:** Ensure you read the EIP and consider how it links to our work, opportunities it presents and issues we need to highlight.  
 With many upcoming events and meetings, try to participate wherever you can and encourage colleagues to do the same. This is an important opportunity to strengthen our relationship with Defra and its arm's-length bodies.