

ADEPT

Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

Monthly Environment Board

Catch-Up Notes

25 February 2026

	<p>Attendees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolyn McKenzie – Chair • Eliza Alqassar • Sarah Bentley • Quinton Carroll • David Dale • Stuart Gardner • Sarah Gilbert • Doug Hill • Kate Langdown <p>Kristi Nicholls – note taker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Mooring • Chitra Nadarajah (part) • Noel O'Neill • James Potter • Kylie Russell • Jemma Sharman • Adam Stewart • Louise Tennekoon 	<p>Action Owner</p>
	<p>Welcome and Introductions CMcK welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>		
	<p>Embedding environmental priorities into Spatial Development Strategies – Aether proposal – Chitra Nadarajah</p> <p>The government has released a consultation on areas eligible to produce Spatial Development Strategies (SDS), confirming that authorities may now undertake preparatory work. SDS are intended as high-level, long-term plans to guide sustainable growth, infrastructure, housing, economic development and environmental resilience across defined geographies. To deliver these ambitions, especially those relating to natural environment resilience, net zero and health and wellbeing, SDS will require robust data, clear baselines and measurable indicators to support evidence-based decisions and prioritisation. The group discussed the challenge of ensuring environmental outcomes are properly embedded within SDS, noting that national focus remains heavily centred on housing, infrastructure and economic growth. To manage complexity, it was agreed that initial work should focus on a small number of priority environmental outcomes, forming a proof-of-concept that could then be expanded with historic environment considerations remaining within the forward plan for future phases. The emerging community of practice should comprise organisational leads responsible for driving SDS-related work, with additional input expected from planning, climate and environment officers as required. Hertfordshire and Surrey will be involved, Oxfordshire also interested.</p> <p>After outlining this proposal to this Environment Board today, the next step is taking it to the ADEPT EPH Board on 18th March and the Climate Change Board on 25th March to consider level of interest. Aether is a new corporate partner of ADEPT specialising in national and international environmental data gathering.</p> <p>David Dale highlighted how ADEPT responded to Local Government Outcomes Framework consultation last year, disappointed at lack of environment and climate KPI's and outcome measures. The Aether proposal might highlight other potential measures.</p> <p>Adam Stewart from Defra (works in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy team) advised there is opportunity to influence with strong legislative links between SDS & LNRS.</p>		<p>CN</p>
	<p>Hot Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Planning Policy Framework consultation https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system <p>ADEPT is responding to the NPPF consultation. A draft of all collated responses will be circulated to all the boards week commencing 2nd March with request for responses to it before 6th March for final submission on 10th March.</p> <p>Kylie Russell shared the TCPA letter which was sent to Ministers and has been published on ADEPT website here: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/the-end-of-zero-carbon-homes/ If you are able to amplify our social media such as this Linked In Post please do so.</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebuilding Nature <p>Carolyn McKenzie confirmed that she has a seat on the steering group to ensure local authorities can feed into discussion how infrastructure can contribute to nature networks and looking at a strategic nature network. Carolyn will keep the Board briefed as the work progresses.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Working Group Updates</p> <p>Waste – No update other than to note that Local Partnerships have presented the LGR Waste Toolkit to the Working Group LGR Waste Toolkit - Local Partnerships</p> <p>Energy & Clean Growth – No Update other than to note that the Working Group meets tomorrow.</p> <p>Flood and Water Management – Doug Hill The Environment Agency is due to review its national Flood Risk Management Strategy this year and has issued an initial questionnaire, rather than a formal consultation, seeking views on gaps within current flood and coastal erosion risk management policy. The working group is drawing on several flood-related reviews from the past two years to highlight lessons that should be incorporated into the revised national strategy with feedback due next week. Significant time is being spent on the minister-chaired Flooding Resilience Task Force, which is about to publish its roadmap setting out key pillars for flood risk management; however, its focus is currently centred on immediate response rather than long-term planning or climate resilience. The group intends to provide feedback on this concern. A meeting with Jonathan Baker at Defra on 3rd March emphasising that local authorities and lead local flood authorities need a stronger voice in shaping national flood risk policy, which is presently perceived as being channelled predominantly through the Environment Agency rather than local bodies.</p> <p>Natural Capital & Heritage – No Update other than to note that Tim De Keyzer has contributed to the NPPF consultation. The next meeting of the Working Group is on 16th March.</p>	
	<p>Partner Updates</p> <p>Defra – Olawale Ladapo (apologies sent with this update) Policy updates English Devolution/Pathfinder programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Partnerships are working on options shortlisting and further testing for their work on devolution and environment and climate leadership and will be report their findings back to Defra at the end of March Defra has now launched a pathfinder with the West of England Combined Authority, focusing on public/private partnerships to reduce flooding, enhance nature recovery, and provide benefits for people through nature-based solutions. <p>Planning and Infrastructure Act and Nature Restoration Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gained Royal Assent on 18 Dec; NRF Implementation Plan also published - confirmed the first Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) will focus on nutrient pollution. Committed to returning to Parliament following the first nutrient EDPs being made, before making further EDPs on other environmental issues. EDPs subject to formal consultation and will be put in place only where conservation measures will materially outweigh negative development effects. We anticipate that consultation on the first EDPs will commence Spring 2026. <p>BNG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two BNG consultations launched May 2025 –Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), and minor/medium/brownfield development. Government responses to both in early 2026, with implementation timeline. December announced that we are proposing an area-based exemption for small sites that are 0.2 hectares or less. We also announced that we will consult rapidly on an additional targeted exemption for residential brownfield development, testing the definition of land to which it should apply and a range of site sizes up to 2.5 hectares. BNG for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) scheduled to go live in May. <p>Local Nature Recovery Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 LNRSs have now been published - remaining 23 expected over coming months to achieve full England-wide coverage. <p>Environment Agency – Simon Adams (apologies sent with this update)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Investment in Natural Capital <p>The LINC programme Cohort of Local and Combined Authorities have worked with Ecorys, Environment Agency and DEFRA to write six 'How To' Guides, to share learning from the programme. The guides are written for other Local and Combined Authorities who are interested in learning more about how they could practically apply different models to secure investment for their natural capital. The newly released guides can be accessed here Green Finance Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flooding 	

The EA recently joined forces with the Met Office to urge those at risk from flooding across the south west to remain vigilant with wet weather set to continue for another month. The start of 2026 has been exceptionally wet – with a strong and unusually southernly jet stream bringing frequent rain, strong winds and wintry hazards. Estimates are that 355 properties have been flooded from various sources as a result of the recent weather, but a further 24,500 have been protected. Since the first wet forecasts in January, EA teams have been working around the clock to reduce the risk of flooding.

- **Managing Drought**

New report: How the 2025 drought developed in England

The EA has published detailed analysis of how last year's drought unfolded. The 18 months before the 2025 drought were the wettest on record for England. Within weeks, we'd moved from flooding to water scarcity: the driest spring since 1893, the hottest summer on record, and nearly 9 million people under hosepipe bans. This report covers the impacts on public water supplies, agriculture, wildlife and navigation – and what we learned about managing extreme conditions. Climate change means we'll see more of these dramatic swings. Building long-term water resilience matters, whatever today's weather. Read the full report: [2025 drought: how it developed in England - GOV.UK](#)

Further information

With the improved water resources position, the [Dry weather and drought in England: summary reports - GOV.UK](#) briefing will now be released monthly. The next briefing is due on 26 February.

- **Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP)**

The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) is a large regulatory framework that outlines the environmental obligations for water companies. It is developed by the EA, Defra, Natural England (NE) and Ofwat. It sets out the water industry's contribution to delivering the wider national objectives for the natural environment as set out in the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and other statutory plans. It is the most important programme of environmental investment in England; it consists of investing £22.1bn of asset improvements, investigations, monitoring, and catchment interventions. WINEP projects are funded through the Price Review process, ensuring that water companies have the necessary resources to meet their environmental obligations. This process is informed by data and evidence from EA, NE and water companies to identify where action is needed.

We have recently added some new WINEP case studies to our Water hub [Water Industry National Environment Programme \(WINEP\) | Engage Environment Agency](#) which may be of interest.

- **Transformation of Planning Service**

As a reminder to an item mentioned in January, this is a strategic initiative to redesign and modernise how the EA delivers spatial planning advice across England, so that it is more predictable, transparent, and evidence informed, supporting sustainable development that grows the economy while protecting the natural environment.

We are still in the Discovery Phase, which runs until the end of March 2026. This early stage is crucial, it is helping us understand how our planning service works today so we can design the modern, strategic service we will need tomorrow. The EA is speaking with local planning authorities, councillors, developers, and partners to understand what is needed from our planning advice. We're also mapping how our current processes operate, identifying problems and exploring opportunities to design a clearer, useful & easier way to engage with service.

We would greatly welcome your input via our consultation; to book an interview, our email address can be accessed using the QR code below:



Please feel free to share this link with colleagues across your organisation who may also wish to contribute.

Natural England – Jemma Sharman

Exciting to see of the things being worked on currently and being discussed across this group around Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Natural England is currently preparing its NPPF consultation response, recognising the government's focus on housing delivery while emphasising the need to fully integrate environmental objectives within the planning system. Alongside this, Natural England is progressing operational changes arising from amendments to the NERC Act and the regulations. The group was also informed about the lead environmental regulator pilots stemming from the Government's Corry Review, designed to streamline engagement with multiple arm's-length bodies by appointing a single regulator for major infrastructure projects, with Natural England piloting this approach for the Lower Thames Crossing.

	<p>Additionally, Natural England is working on local plan reform in parallel with local government, preparing for changes once new legislation is enacted and considering how its role must adapt to best support planning authorities. These developments are closely connected to the emerging spatial development strategies and their links with LNRS, presenting shared opportunities to strengthen environmental and climate considerations within strategic planning.</p>	
	<p>ADEPT update</p> <p>Transport / Infrastructure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We are working with Local Partnerships to develop a LGR highways toolkit. The purpose of the toolkit will be to provide a collection of resources (processes, templates, checklists etc) to support council officers navigating transport and highways aggregation / disaggregation of services due to LGR. The toolkit will be loosely based on the Local Partnerships waste LGR toolkit, which has been well received across the sector LGR Waste Toolkit - Local Partnerships. It will be launched at the ADEPT Spring Conference (13th May); we will also co-host an introductory webinar on 4th June. Details on how to register for the webinar to follow. 2. ADEPT responded to the recent publication of the 'pothole ratings map' (here). Angela Jones, President of ADEPT said: "We acknowledge the government's commitment to transparency and long-term investment in local roads, however the newly published ratings raise significant questions about the assessment methodology." 3. Live Labs 2: We have launched a pledge that invites stakeholders to drive meaningful decarbonisation across all aspects of the UK's road network and rethink how the highways infrastructure reduces carbon (here). The second webinar for pledge signatories took place on 28th January, focusing 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). Webinar No 3 will take place from 9-10am on 25th March. If you would to attend, please email Damon McVeigh. The latest blog is from Graham Martin, Head of Commissioning and Project Delivery for the Liverpool Live Labs 2 initiative, who shares an update on all the latest news and achievements from the team (here). We are delighted that DfT has recently confirmed an extension of the ADEPT Live Labs 2 programme for an additional year, with up to £300,000 in total (here). This extension will enable the programme to deliver a comprehensive Year 4 programme of communications and dissemination with a view to scaling and adoption by the sector; ensuring that the insights, evidence and innovations generated by the seven Live Labs 2 projects are shared widely across the sector. The LL2 projects finish 31st March 2026, with the exception of the Devon Live Lab which received a year's extension due to delays. <p>Devolution / Growth / Planning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group have responded to the current call for evidence on reforming planning rules for digital infrastructure (here). 5. We are hosting a webinar with Natural England on 10th March to launch the Natural England EXPLORE Framework. EXPLORE is 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. The Framework aims to contribute to better places, healthier communities, and greener futures. To register to attend, see here. 6. We hosted a joint webinar with Natural England on 15th January, focusing on one of the elements of the new Planning & Infrastructure Act: the new Nature Restoration Fund, Environmental Delivery Plans & conservation delivery in local planning. Over 100 people attended – if you missed out and would like to see the recording, please contact Hannah Bartram. <p>Environment / Climate</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. We responded to the publication in December of the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (here). We are presently pulling together the response to the NPPF consultation and will be circulating it for comment. 8. In the most recent climate change blog, ADEPT Chief Executive Officer, Hannah Bartram discusses the launch of the President's Awards 2026 and looks at why entering your sustainable growth project could mean national recognition for your achievements. 9. On 20th 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. <p>Events/Other</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. The 2025 PACE Programme wrapped up with a Lunch & Learn session on 28th January, and a blog from one of the cohort, Emma Gee, Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services at Reading Borough Council. Amey has confirmed ongoing support for the PACE Programme in 2026, which is fantastic news. The programme is only open to executive directors. If you would like to participate, please get in touch with Hannah Bartram as soon as possible. 11. 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 by Angela Jones, President of ADEPT and Director of Thriving Places at Westmorland and Furness Council, who examines the question "what is place, really?" You can read Angela's essay here. 12. Dates for your diary – for more detail please visit the Events page on the website (here): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A draft of ADEPT's new Strategic Plan for 2026-29 has been released for consultation, with members invited to provide feedback ahead of its formal launch in May. You can read the draft 	

	<p>here. The proposed plan, currently titled <i>Making Better Places</i>, sets out our strategic objectives for 2026-29, celebrates some of our key achievements over the period of the previous Strategic Plan and outlines the main changes and challenges that we must address. Please send comments / responses to Katherine at secretariat@adeptnet.org.uk by Friday 13th March.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the momentum from our ADEPT Autumn Conference workshop, Stantec and ADEPT are hosting a focused roundtable to move from discussion to action. This session will bring together senior leaders from local and regional government and delivery-focused private sector organisations to explore the opportunities, pressures, and emerging solutions shaping collaboration today. Thursday, 19 March 2026, 11.30 – 13.00, MS Teams. Please email zoe.plenderleith@stantec.com if you are interested in being an important part of the conversation. • Colas, Equans and ADEPT are hosting an in-person roundtable session, “From Mitigation to Adaptation: Embedding Resilience in Place Based Infrastructure”, which will bring together leaders for an in-depth discussion on future ready infrastructure. The workshop takes place on Thursday 19th March at the Manchester Art Gallery. Please complete the registration form for this invite only event: From Mitigation to Adaptation: Embedding Resilience in Place-Based Infrastructure. • The Spring Conference, AGM and Annual Awards Dinner will be held in London on 13th May 2026. Transport Minister Simon Lightwood is confirmed as the headline speaker – to see the full programme and to register, see here. 	
	<p>AOB Next meeting is scheduled on Tuesday 24th March 11.00-12.00.</p>	