**ADEPT Environment Board report for AGM 21st May 2020**

The Environment Board met four times during the year. On 25th July – the hottest day on record – appropriately, our first speaker was Sarah Woodhall from Public Health England (PHE), talking about the development of a single adverse weather plan as required under the second National Adaptation Programme. The meeting discussed how can PHE and ADEPT best work together on the adaptation agenda, and the role for Place directorates in adverse weather planning. Other business included:

* an update on the Environment Bill from Defra’s Stakeholder Engagement Team
* an update on air quality from Defra’s Local Air Quality team
* Natural England’s Green Infrastructure standards project, and
* the Oxford/Cambridge growth arc Local Natural Capital Plan.

The afternoon workshop on Achieving Clean Growth – Pathways to a Net Zero 2050 was led by Carolyn McKenzie Energy Group Chair), with speakers from BEIS, Cheshire & Warrington LEP, and LASER Energy Company.

The October meeting was held jointly with the Sustainable Growth Board on the subject of climate change. Speakers included the COP26 team from the Cabinet Office, and we discussed potential opportunities for ADEPT to promote and showcase council initiatives, and to contribute to the programme of events aimed at maximising clean growth investment that will run before and after the main COP26 event (now postponed until 2021). The meeting heard about ADEPT’s programme of work on climate change and what our local government partners the LGA and LEDNet are doing. There were also interesting presentations from a number of other partner organisations – Friends of the Earth, Ashden, and the RTPI – highlighting some of the resources for councils that they have developed.

The afternoon workshop was delivered by Defra and the Environment Agency, looking at pressures on the water environment, public health benefits and risks, and the role of local authorities in spatial planning and land management. We discussed different scenarios around too much water, too little water, and water quality, and looked at the need for a place-based natural capital approach and issues for water companies.

On 27th January we were pleased to welcome David Hill, the new Director General (Environment, Rural & Marine) at Defra. David gave a useful update on issues and priorities following the General Election, covering the Environment Bill, the COP26 climate change conference, EU exit, and some key events such as the Budget and the spending review. On COP26, he welcomed ADEPT’s engagement and said that Defra will be leading work on the nature-based solutions workstream – one of the four main themes the government is to highlight. Other business included a discussion about the Environment Agency’s *Challenges and Choices* consultation on river basin planning.

The afternoon workshop was held jointly with the Sustainable Growth Board, on strategic planning for nature conservation. The workshop was led by Professor Alister Scott (Northumbria University) who has been commissioned by MHCLG to undertake research on this.

The meeting on 23rd April was a virtual one via Microsoft Teams. We were joined by Susanna May, Director of Environmental Quality at Defra, who updated us on Covid-19 work in relation to access to green spaces, waste management and air quality. There was also an update from the Environment Agency on the challenges faced moving floods emergency response in February to Covid-19 in March. We heard from our Working Group chairs on their work and how Covid-19 has impacted across waste, natural capital, flood and water, and energy. The Waste group in particular had been very busy running a weekly survey (in partnership with NAWDO, LARAC and the LGA) of local authority collection and disposal services, and liaising with Defra on priorities and operations. Susanna May also briefed the Board on progress with the Environment Bill: while government intends to reintroduce the Bill at a suitable time there is no indication yet of when this will be. The Board is planning monthly 1-hour virtual catch ups in May and June while the Covid-19 emergency is ongoing.

Outside of the Board’s formal meetings, climate change has been a major focus throughout the year as the government made a commitment to carbon net zero by 2050 and many councils declared a climate emergency and set themselves more challenging targets. Climate change and environment is one of ADEPT’s 3 strategic priorities. We published our policy position on climate change last summer, and the ADEPT/Defra/LAAP joint publication ‘*Adaptation Good Practice Guide’.* ADEPT chairs the Local Adaptation Advisory Panel (LAAP). In addition:

* The Live Labs programme includes a ‘smart energy’ theme
* There were sessions at the Autumn Conference (see below)
* We have developed the climate change hub on the website, with information, resources, blogs, etc. to support members
* There were four regional workshops during January-March in the Midlands, South West, South East and East of England, with case studies from 11 different councils and contributions from partners including the LGA, Ashden, and the Greening Campaign
* A Corporate Partners workshop in March with input from WSP, Skanska, Costain and Amey
* A *Green Finance Toolkit* (from the Excellence in Place Leadership Programme) and Clean Growth policy position are due to be published late May.

We set up a climate change Advisory Panel in the autumn with local government and NGO partners. From this has developed a coalition working on shared policy asks of government, setting out what local authorities can offer and need to deliver climate change ambitions. The themes cover growing the zero and low carbon economy, retrofitting homes and buildings, decarbonising transport, planning, waste and consumption, restoring nature, and funding and governance. The coalition is also looking at immediate priority asks to kickstart the economy post-emergency. We hope to complete the policy asks work by late June.

The Environment Board made a big contribution to the ADEPT Autumn Conference in Bath last November. Paula Hewitt chaired a plenary session on preparing for a changing world, with speakers from the Natural Capital Committee (Dieter Helm), UK100, and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The programme of workshops included Building with Nature, chaired by Nigel Riglar, and Clean Growth, chaired by Carolyn Mackenzie.

The Board’s Chair and members have taken part in various Defra Stakeholder Forum discussions about the Environment Bill. The Bill has been introduced to Parliament twice already – before and after the General Election – and had reached the Committee stage in the Commons before all regular legislation was postponed on 19th March due to the Covid-19 emergency.

Members of the Board have contributed regular articles to the [Environment Journal](https://environmentjournal.online/) and over the last 12 months we have had 9 pieces published, covering a range of subjects including energy, clean growth, green infrastructure, climate change, flooding, and the 25 Year Environment Plan.