**ADEPT statement on proposed amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) to change environmental law**

*The following statement was issued in advance of the debate in the House of Lords on 13th September 2023 at the Report Stage of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The Lords discussed a government amendment to allow nutrient pollution from new developments to enter rivers in areas currently impacted by Natural England’s nutrient neutrality advice. The amendment was defeated.*

Cutting regulation will increase pollution, damage nature and harm people’s health. It is wrong and unsustainable for new developments to be allowed that may make the environment even worse. Government should be enforcing high standards and also ensuring pollution from agriculture and water companies is reduced. We need more new homes and we have the technology to build them to the highest environmental and climate change standards, as well as improving our outdated infrastructure – this is what government should be requiring house builders to do.

The proposed amendments to the LURB would make changes to the Habitats Regulations and permit some environmentally damaging developments to proceed without proper consideration of nutrient pollution and its harmful impact on protected wildlife sites. We note that the Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has written to the Secretaries of State advise them that the proposed changes would demonstrably reduce the level of environmental protection provided for in existing environmental law – “they are a regression.” The OEP reminds us the government has emphasised on many occasions its commitment not to weaken legal protections for the environment, and this proposed regression runs counter to assurances previously given to Parliament.

We recognise that nutrient neutrality is a complex issue that must be resolved. Some of our member authorities are experiencing the detrimental effect of blocking much-needed new housing development in parts of the country, even though housing is not the main cause of nutrient pollution. Local authorities are working hard with developers and Natural England to mitigate the impact of nutrient pollution and protect wildlife sites to allow houses to be built where possible. We welcome the government’s announcement of more funding for mitigation schemes. However, we believe that ill-considered amendments to the LURB at this late stage in the legislative process is not the appropriate way to resolve nutrient neutrality.