

MINUTES, ACTIONS & DECISION NOTES

Meeting title	ADEPT Midlands Regional Board
Location/Platform	Microsoft Teams Meeting
Date and time	Friday 7 th March 2025
Apologies	Andrew Pritchard, Angie Astley, Darryl Eyers, Dave Brown, George Candler, James Bailey, Joe Battye, John Roseblade, Kylie Russell, Khamaljit Khokar, Sarah Spink, Victoria Lazenby

Attendees	Organisation
Andy Gutherson (AG) - <i>Chair</i>	Lincolnshire County Council
David Dale	ADEPT
Dean Ward	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Derek Higton	Nottinghamshire County Council
Graeme Kane	North Northamptonshire Council
Hannah Bartram	ADEPT
Ian Doust	National Highways
Janna Walker	Leicestershire County Council
Jon Vining	Staffordshire County Council
Louise Clare	DfT
Mark Ryder	Warwickshire County Council
Nick Henstock	West Northamptonshire Council
Penny Sharp	Rutland County Council
Scott Tompkins	Herefordshire County Council
Philip Edwards	Birmingham City Council
Rhiannon Evans	Active Travel England
Abigail Wells (AW) - <i>Notes</i>	Lincolnshire County Council
Guest speakers	Organisation
Martin Hutchings	Planning Advisory Service

Agenda Item

1 | Welcome, introductions and apologies

AG welcomed attendees to the session and noted apologies.

2 | Review of Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions

AG welcomed a review of the minutes and notes from the last meeting. AG referenced the agenda item on UKREiIF and encouraged updates from those attending the event on progress being made with plans for their presence. AG emphasized the importance of the event for Greater Lincolnshire to showcase the region's ambitions and the opportunities that arise from having an elected mayor.

Reflecting on the Solihull Heat Network presentation, AG asked HB for an update on the action to bring the presentation to the ADEPT Energy and Green Growth Board. HB explained that the

action had been followed up but delays have been faced due to a change of board chair. HB assured the group that the action would be chased up again.

AG recalled that the group discussed budget implications following the Autumn Statement 2024. AG invited the group to share reflections on budget processes and financial challenges faced by authorities. AG shared that Lincolnshire is forecasting a £53 million gap in year three of their medium-term financial plan, prompting internal processes to manage the gap. JW mentioned similar challenges in Leicestershire, with a forecasted £90 million gap by the end of the medium-term financial strategy, leading to the use of reserves. JV and MR echoed these concerns, highlighting significant gaps in their financial plans and the need for savings across services. DH noted a manageable gap in Nottinghamshire's medium-term financial strategy and the positive impact of the combined authority on their financial situation. The group agreed to facilitate a future agenda item relating to whether services can be the same following budget cuts.

AG and JW discussed the proposal to develop a graduate network. JW mentioned that progress had been slow due to scheduling conflicts but assured the group that the action is being progressed. AG shared that Lincolnshire County Council are developing an internal leadership programme to bring together representatives from core services for networking and better understanding of cross-service demands.

ACTIONS:

- HB to revisit action to facilitate a Solihull Heat Network presentation at the ADEPT Energy and Green Growth Board.
- AW to schedule a future session on the implications of budget cuts on services, and potential delivery models.

3 | Street Light Dimming

JW shared a presentation with group relating to the street light dimming initiative in Leicestershire, explaining the financial and environmental benefits. The initiative aims to dim all street lights between 8:00 PM and 10:00 PM to 30% power. Despite concerns about safety, the trial showed significant carbon savings (280 tonnes), energy savings (over a million kilowatt hours), and cashable savings (£491,000), with minimal public complaints. JW highlighted the importance of balancing financial pressures with environmental commitments and shared plans to recommend permanent implementation. JW also noted that the main investment was staff time and system upgrades, with a budget of around £40,000. The trial included adjustments for areas with higher interaction, such as crossings and town centres, and feedback from members who experienced the dimming firsthand. The initiative faced some pushback from legal and insurance teams, but the trial helped demonstrate its reasonableness.

DW shared that Solihull is at a similar stage in the process and mentioned that they had received complaints about lights being too bright during their trial. DW asked if JW's team had any conversations with safety auditors, as Solihull's auditors had indicated that dimming did not make a difference. JW responded that they had discussions with legal and insurance teams, who were initially concerned but were reassured by the trial's reasonableness and evidence. HB advised that there is a Live Labs 2 project led by East Riding that explores fundamental questions about street lighting and its purpose. HB highlighted the potential for significant

savings, environmental benefits and roll out across the Midlands from such initiatives. HB also noted interesting research which had been undertaken as part of the Live Labs 2 project on safety. This research is available at the following link - <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/live-labs-2/east-riding-yorkshire-council-high-visual-efficiency-low-carbon-lighting-decarbonising>

MR inquired about the investment needed for technology to enable dimming, noting that about 50% of Warwickshire stock could not be dimmed without investment. JW explained that Leicestershire had received a grant to upgrade their street lights to LED, which included dimming technology. She offered to provide more details on the investment and system upgrades. ST shared experiences of street light dimming in Gloucestershire, where they had invested in a full CMS system for LED lights, allowing easy dimming. ST emphasized the importance of having the right technology in place. GK asked about the lighting levels and standards used in the trial, noting that perceptions of dimming could vary based on initial lighting levels. JW offered to provide a timeline of previous lighting initiatives and compare them to the current trial.

ACTIONS:

- JW to share slides with the group.
- JW to share more details on investment and system upgrades for street light dimming with MR.
- JW to provide a timeline of previous lighting initiatives and compare lighting levels with those on the current trial.

4 BNG

AG welcomed MH to the meeting and recognised the cross service impact of BNG. AG highlight opportunities for further support and engagement with the Planning Advisory Service. MH emphasized the importance of integrating BNG into development management and local plans, highlighting the challenges and opportunities. MH discussed the need for early biodiversity information in planning applications, the impact on viability, and the role of local authorities in regulating the BNG market. MH noted that BNG is a legal requirement under the Environment Act, with a 10% statutory gain, and encouraged councils to be bold and consistent in their decision-making.

MR raised the issue of appeals and how decisions on BNG might be challenged by developers. MH explained that while there have been few appeals so far, one notable case involved a pig farm where the developer claimed de minimis exemption. The appeal upheld the council's stance, providing a useful precedent. MH emphasized the importance of consistency in decision-making to withstand appeals. JW expressed concerns about the impact of BNG on the viability of sites, particularly in the context of highways and education. MH acknowledged that BNG could affect viability, as developers cannot argue viability to avoid the 10% gain requirement. MH noted that other planning costs, such as affordable housing, might become more vulnerable. MH suggested that integrating BNG into site acquisition processes early on could mitigate some viability challenges.

DD referred to the new BNG Implementation Board established by DEFRA with the development sector and asked whether it might address challenges identified by PAS in the

first year of implementation. DD also asked about the success of BNG in different types of councils, noting that smaller urban authorities struggle with viable development and keeping BNG enhancements local. MH confirmed that the BNG Implementation Board is managed by the Future Homes Hub, emphasizing its focus on the development sector and the importance of local planning authorities' input. MH responded that urban councils face difficulties in delivering BNG, especially on smaller sites, leading to off-site solutions. Larger councils with more resources and partnerships are more successful in implementing BNG. MH mentioned Coventry's progress with BNG through collaboration with other councils.

JV asked about local authorities entering the offsite provision market and differentiating themselves from private landowners. MH shared examples of councils like Buckinghamshire, which have developed market regulation processes to manage habitat banks. MH highlighted the complexities of legal agreements and the need for resources to support such initiatives. MH offered to share a recorded session with Buckinghamshire Council on their process.

AG discussed the potential acquisition of a site for off-site activities to fill a local gap and make a viable business case. AG mentioned the need to follow up with others who might be ahead in this area. MH highlighted the importance of legal agreements with responsible bodies or neighbouring authorities to achieve uplift. ST offered to discuss Herefordshire's success in trading phosphate credits with developers and developing council land into wetlands. ST suggested adding this topic to a future agenda and recommended talking to MR about Warwickshire's legal agreements and tree nursery.

GK shared experience with a planning application for a bypass, highlighting the challenge of obtaining BNG aquatic credits due to the linear nature of the road and the need to work with local landowners who were not supportive. GK also reflected on North Northamptonshire's achievement in having their local nature recovery strategy approved by Natural England, making it the second in the country.. Additionally, GK emphasized the importance of legal agreements in BNG projects and expressed interest in learning from others, particularly Coventry and Buckinghamshire, about handling legal aspects.

ACTIONS:

- MH to share recorded session with Buckinghamshire Council on their process for market regulation.
- ST to facilitate a future agenda item on Herefordshire's phosphate credits trading with developers.

5 | Devolution Update and LGR Discussion

AG welcomed the group to share reflections on the implications and challenges of LGR, and any updates on Devolution journeys. AG also proposed making LGR a standing item to facilitate knowledge sharing and support. The following feedback was shared with the group:

Lincolnshire – AG advised that the inaugural meeting of the Greater Lincolnshire County Combined Authority (GLCCA) was held on Thursday 6th May, including a celebratory service and a reception with businesses. Mayoral elections for the GLCCA are scheduled for 1st May, with several candidates declared. AG reflected on commitments to a light combined authority, though recognised that there may be adjustments to the organisational model post-

election. WSP is working with constituent authorities to develop options for how the Transport Authority within the GLCCA could function. This includes creating a sliding scale of options to debate and consider, identifying areas where additional capacity or changes in working methods are needed.

LCC are working towards a deadline of 21st March for submission of their LGR proposal to the Secretary of State. The submission will include two main options: maintaining the current LCC boundary while incorporating district activities and functions, and combining the unitary authorities of North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council into a single unitary authority; or drawing a line between East Lindsay and West Lindsay district boundaries to meet the population threshold, noting this would disrupt district boundaries and services. Districts are expected to submit alternative proposals, including three unitaries and a Lincoln City donut model. AG advised that, once the Secretary of State provides direction, work will begin on developing a business case by mid-November.

Warwickshire - MR discussed a cabinet decision to submit a case for a single unitary Warwickshire with a population of 620,000, meeting the required threshold. Despite no consensus, four of the five districts will propose a two-unitary model, which does not meet the population requirement. MR expressed disappointment that the government will only provide observations on the submissions, leading to a potential delay in progressing development of the preferred option.

MR suggested forming a forum to discuss key components of a single unitary business case, including inputs from those already working in a single-tier environment. HB mentioned a webinar on April 4th with speakers from North Yorkshire, Somerset, Cumbria, and Northamptonshire to share lessons learned from their experiences in becoming unitary authorities. DD announced that the registration link for the LGR webinar was sent out in the ADEPT newsletter. DD discussed intentions to develop focus on incorporating more content related to environment and climate change into the new strategic authority role, which was vaguely defined in the Devolution White Paper. HB added that following the LGR webinar in April, there will be another webinar for combined authorities. HB noted interest in AG's work with WSP on transport responsibilities and mentioned upcoming meetings with MHCLG and DfT about the LGR Devolution agenda. The group considered the proposed thresholds for LGR and what could be justified as an exceptional circumstance for not meeting one of them. AG proposed that ADEPT could assist in developing a collective view on what might constitute an exceptional circumstance.

Staffordshire - JV discussed the complexities of LGR and devolution in Staffordshire, particularly around Stoke on Trent. As the Devolution White Paper's wording necessitated reconsideration of devolution, Staffordshire opened discussions. The County Council now supports a mayoral body covering Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, with a combined population of about 1.2 million. Stoke City Council proposed a model including Stoke on Trent and two northern districts, which could meet the population requirement. JV noted concerns about how southern districts relate to the West Midlands and potential boundary issues. The County Council's preferred approach is a county-wide footprint including the current geography and eight districts, though there is some nervousness about southern districts'

inclusion. JV expressed concern about how LGR might affect working relationships with district councils, given partnerships on many projects. JV advised that uncertainty about government preference for the proposals will impact business case development, requiring significant work over the next 6-8 months.

Rutland and Leicestershire - PS discussed three proposals for the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland footprint. Leicestershire County Council will submit a proposal for two unitaries based on the authority's existing footprint, excluding Rutland, and Leicester City as a unitary. Leicester City has an elected mayor, complicating devolution conversations. All parties agree that devolution discussions will follow a solution for LGR. Leicester City may submit its own proposal for two unitaries, expanding its footprint by incorporating some districts. The districts plus Rutland will propose a northern unitary with four districts and a southern unitary with four other districts, though this does not meet the 500,000 population threshold.

Solihull and Birmingham - DW mentioned that Solihull's focus is on dealing with the fallout from the EFS and the implications for the local authority. Solihull recently reorganized the borough from a ward perspective. PE noted that their mayoral combined authority is in the latter stages of agreeing on the devolution deal. Economic and Place strategies are in development, tying various funding pillars together, with deadlines around May. PE highlighted challenges in planning proposals, particularly housing, and the potential for the mayor to determine major strategic planning applications. PE emphasized the need for transformation in transport operations, given the inefficiencies of having seven local highway authorities and maintenance contracts. PE mentioned significant budget cuts and the need for mature discussions around taxi licensing. PE also stressed the importance of relationships, noting that the new regional mayor is working collaboratively across Labour and Conservative authorities.

North Northants and West Northants – NH outlined the submission of a bid to continue working with South Midlands authorities, but outlined the challenges of three of these authorities no longer being interested in cooperating. GK highlighted the extensive time and effort required for LGR and devolution, noting that they are approaching their fourth anniversary of LGR with much still to be sorted. GK emphasized the importance of looking forward and adapting to changing government directions. GK also mentioned recent discussions with Surrey and Birmingham about their experiences and challenges, offering to share insights and support with others.

Herefordshire - ST discussed Herefordshire's position as a unitary authority with a population of 300,000. The general sentiment is to maintain their current status and avoid merging with neighbouring authorities, given their stable financial situation. Herefordshire is collaborating with Welsh authorities and Shropshire through the Marches Partnership, potentially considering a combined authority in the future. However, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire are pursuing unitary status. ST mentioned that Herefordshire plans to write to the government about the challenges posed by increased housing targets and the impact on their local plans. Local plan consultation had to be halted and the process now needs to be restarted, which will take considerable time and may not meet government guidelines. Despite this, there is support housing growth as it aligns with their long-term strategy for a Western growth corridor and a bypass around Hereford.

ACTION:

- HB to support with developing a collective view on what might constitute an exceptional circumstance for not meeting an LGR threshold, on behalf of ADEPT.

6 | ADEPT Updates

HB shared reflections from the quarterly catch up with DfT. HB advised that DfT aims to secure a three-year funding allocation, moving from annual to multi-year settlements for BSIP. Discussions also took place about a shift away from competitive funding, with no competitive funds identified in DfT's proposals to the Treasury for the next spending review period. This change could impact how local housing authorities receive income for highways maintenance and capital expenditure. The conversation touched on expanding existing funds and introducing a maintenance structures fund. DfT is addressing the fallout from the Public Accounts Committee inquiry and the National Audit Office study on highways and maintenance. Discussions also progressed around the role of STBs in the changing devolution landscape, including potential boundary changes and how authorities interface. HB noted conversations about moving to an outcomes framework, which represents a different approach to delivering and measuring success. The discussion on this topic was brief due to time constraints.

HB shared ADEPT updates with the group; the items discussed are available to review within Appendix 1. Relating to update 3, HB advised that a Home to School SEND Working Group is being revived, including DfE and LGA. Efforts are being made to involve the Department for Transport (DfT) as well. AG emphasized the importance of DfT's involvement, given that transport authorities manage educational travel. HB agreed, noting that DfT should join DfE in addressing the issue jointly. MR inquired about the monthly meetings, and HB confirmed that individual local authorities are welcome to participate. She highlighted the collaboration between children's services and transport authorities, despite the challenges driven by policy.

7 | AOB

AG encouraged the group to share any proposals for future agenda items. AG also highlighted that the September meeting will be taking place in person, and it is proposed that Leicestershire would be a reasonable location for the group.

Next meeting:

Friday 20th June 2025, 9am-12pm

Microsoft Teams Meeting