

LEADING PLACES: Essays from past, present and future ADEPT Presidents

Celebrating 140 years of place-based leadership - ADEPT, since 1885
Making the case for people and place

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of local authority place directors and their teams.

Our members manage vital local services - from highways, waste, recycling and planning - while also preparing for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

ADEPT is a membership based, voluntary organisation with members across England. We bring together directors from county, unitary, metropolitan and combined authorities, along with sub-national transport bodies and corporate partners drawn from key service sectors.

www.adeptnet.org.uk



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Celebrating 140 years

ADEPT is celebrating 140 years of excellence in place-based leadership across environment, economy, planning and transport. The organisation has evolved from the County Surveyors' Society - originally focused on road construction and maintenance - into a modern organisation serving local authorities across the place sector.

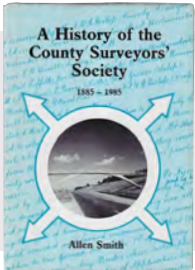
Dating back to the first meeting of the County Surveyors' Society (CSS) on 19th November 1885, the organisation has consistently served as an authoritative voice, successfully influencing national policy and providing insight into funding and policy changes for both local and national government. ADEPT acts as a vital resource for members, providing professional guidance, networking opportunities and knowledge sharing.

This collection of essays marks ADEPT's 140th anniversary 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.

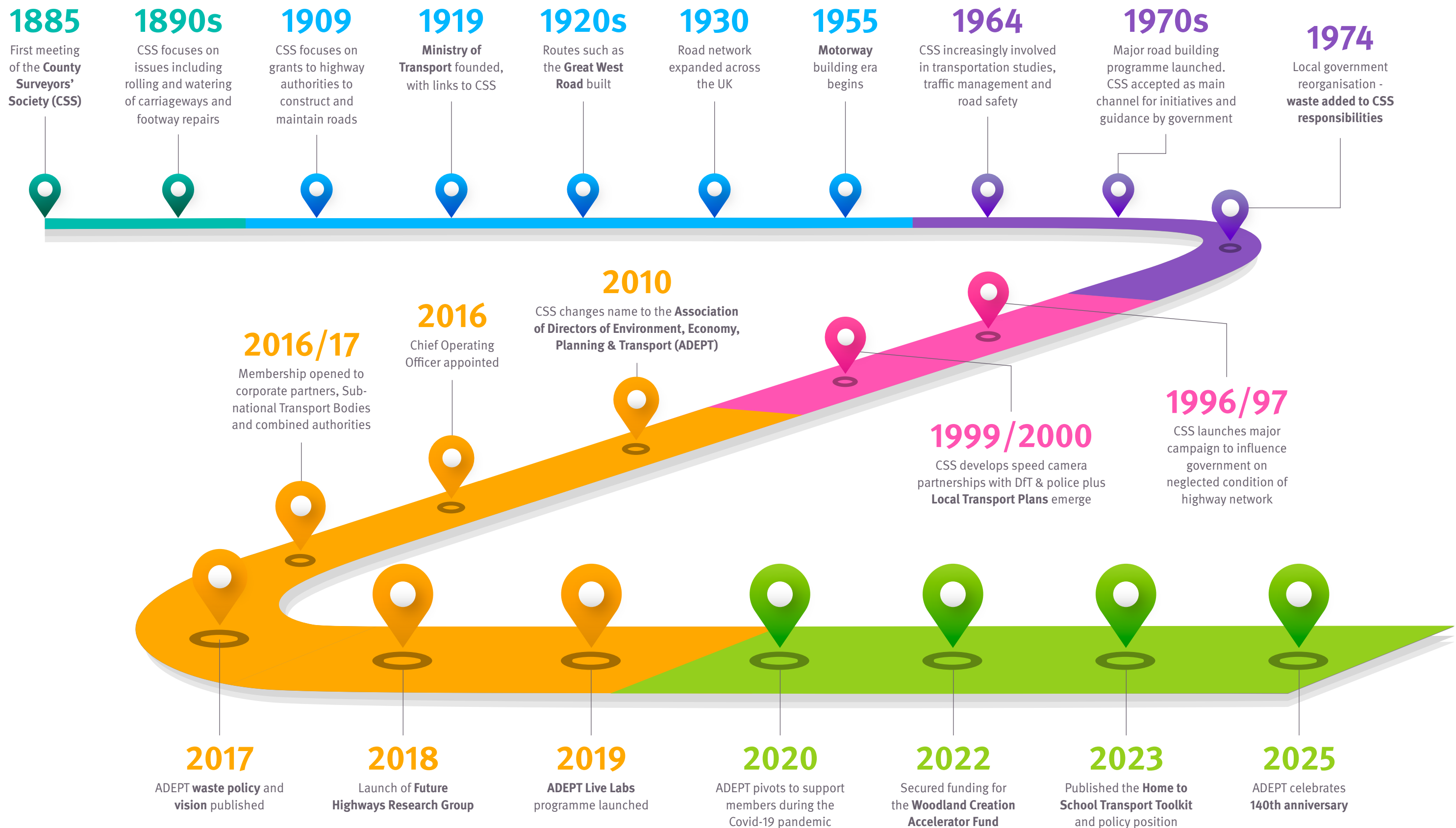
www.adeptnet.org.uk/140th-anniversary

What were County Surveyors?

County Surveyors held senior positions in local government highways departments, responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges.



Celebrating 140 years of excellence in place-based leadership



1. What is place, really?



Angela Jones, President of ADEPT and Director of Thriving Places at Westmorland and Furness Council.



Angela Jones

“ *It's not just the physical environment that make a place - it's the people, relationships and strength in the community that give a place its identity...* ”

At 3pm on 19th November 1885, eleven county surveyors gathered at the Town Hall on Caxton Street, Westminster to establish what would become the County Surveyors' Society. When those eleven men sat around the table that afternoon, they could have had little idea of what was to follow.

From that modest beginning, the Society evolved from a focus on road construction and maintenance into ADEPT - a modern organisation serving local authorities across the entire place sector. Over the past 140 years, ADEPT has become an authoritative voice, influencing national policy and providing insight into funding and policy developments for both local and national government.

As ADEPT marks this milestone anniversary, we invited past Presidents - and two future Presidents - to reflect on what place and place leadership truly mean. This collection of essays takes you on a journey through time, looking back at how our profession has evolved, examining the pressing issues we face today, exploring ADEPT's core themes and imagining the future we want to create.

Each President brings their unique perspective, shaped by the challenges and opportunities of their era. But running through all these reflections, you'll find common threads: a deep commitment to communities, a belief in the power of collaboration and a shared understanding that place is about far more than physical infrastructure.

As ADEPT's current President, it feels right for me to begin by asking a fundamental question: what is place, really?

For me, 'place' represents a sense of belonging and identity. My perspectives on 'place' are rooted from my upbringing in Millom, a small coastal town in the southern part of Cumbria at the edge of the Lake District. It's not just the physical environment that make a place - it's the people, relationships and strength in the community that give a place its identity.

Professionally, this translates to my role in shaping places, developing policies and initiatives that strengthen communities, balancing economic development, heritage and environmental sustainability.

Over the years, ADEPT has mirrored this approach, expanding from its roots in road construction and maintenance to an organisation leading on place-based leadership across environment, economy, planning and transport.

Why identity and community resilience matter

One of my proudest moments was working with the community leading recovery efforts after Storm Desmond in 2015, when severe flooding devastated Cumbria, flooding homes, businesses and damaging bridges and critical infrastructure. My experience in place leadership was shaped by this emergency, both in the response and recovery. My role was leading community recovery efforts, ensuring recovery addressed both the physical damage and the wellbeing of community.

This flooding event reinforced my belief and values that effective place leadership requires a holistic approach, balancing the social, economic and environmental benefits. What made me proud was the way communities came together, looked after each other, rebuilt, and recovered. It was truly inspiring.

Resilience, both environmental and social, lies at the heart of place leadership - it's about preparing for the unexpected and ensuring that the choices we make today create the conditions for future generations to thrive.

Balancing governance and lived experience

One of the biggest challenges local authorities face is leading long-term strategic change and ambition, while ensuring day-to-day services and projects are delivered effectively. Constrained budgets, competing priorities, lack of public trust and complex place relationships can create tension between strategic and political ambitions and operational reality.

The way I try to approach this challenge is to keep hold of the long-term vision, and celebrate success when delivering the practical milestones. Strong collaboration and partnership working can help gain trust and credibility with public, elected officials and partners.

In addition, success in place leadership is not simply measured in KPIs, targets or completing projects. It's measured in lived experience of our workforce, residents, communities, businesses and partners.

At its best, place leadership connects governance and lived experience, translating policy into action that people can see, feel, and trust.

The future of place

Looking back over 140 years, the decisions and values of our ancestors have shaped the places we live in today. Our responsibility now is to act as good ancestors ourselves, making decisions grounded in integrity, equity and sustainability so that future generations, communities and the environment can continue to thrive.

My advice to the next generation of place leaders is this: there will always be a crisis, funding pressures, and political and policy changes - these are constant and adaptability is key. Embrace change and innovation. Be prepared to make mistakes - engender a culture where calculated risks and change for good are supported and setbacks are reframed as opportunities to innovate. Be proud of what you do and celebrate success.

Looking ahead

So, what is place, really? It's where people belong, where communities thrive and where our decisions today shape the lives of generations to come.

In the pages that follow, you'll hear from Presidents who have led ADEPT through times of transformation - from local government reorganisation to climate emergencies, from austerity to innovation. Each brings wisdom earned through experience, and together, these voices create a powerful testament to the enduring importance of place leadership.

As you read these essays, I hope you'll be inspired by the dedication, resilience and vision of those who have shaped our profession. And I hope you'll join us in making the case for people and place - not just as a theme, but as a strategic mindset and call to action for our sector.

2. Leading through change: leadership and resilience



Nigel Riglar, Past President of ADEPT (2020-21) and Executive Director - Place, South Gloucestershire Council.



Nigel Riglar

“ For me, ‘place’ is much more than geography - it’s about identity, community and opportunity. It’s a dynamic concept shaped by people, policy and purpose... ”

I have been a longstanding member of ADEPT, including serving as President during the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout my career, I have been an advocate for cross-sector collaboration and systems thinking in public service delivery.

For me, ‘place’ is much more than geography - it’s about identity, community and opportunity. It’s a dynamic concept shaped by people, policy and purpose. Professionally, it’s the lens through which I approach sustainable development, infrastructure and wellbeing. When we think about place, we’re really thinking about how people live, work, connect and thrive.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of leading South Gloucestershire through major infrastructure projects, for example Charfield Station - initiatives that will shape the area for generations to come. I’m particularly proud of championing climate resilience and inclusive growth through regional partnerships, where collaboration has been key to achieving outcomes that no single organisation could deliver alone.

I have watched ADEPT evolve from a technical body to a strategic influencer in national policy. It is increasingly recognised for its thought leadership and convening power and has become a trusted voice in shaping the future of place.

Leadership during Covid-19

Covid-19 brought unparalleled disruption, requiring rapid adaptation and clear communication. As leaders, we faced the dual challenge of balancing immediate crisis response with long-term strategic goals. Services that had operated in familiar patterns for decades had to transform overnight. Teams that had never worked remotely were suddenly managing complex operations from kitchen tables.

Throughout this period, and indeed through other times of significant change, navigating political shifts while maintaining service continuity and staff morale was crucial. Leadership in these moments isn’t just about making decisions - it’s about holding steady, communicating clearly and ensuring people feel supported and valued.

As President of ADEPT during the pandemic, it became clear that setting priorities was essential: I focused on convening members, sharing best practice and influencing national policy. The ADEPT network became a lifeline, providing a space to share what was working, what wasn’t, and what we were learning in real-time.

I emphasised transparency, empathy and agility in everything we did. There was no playbook for leading through a global pandemic, but there were principles we could hold onto. I worked to support colleagues through uncertainty while advocating for place-based recovery - ensuring that as we looked to emerge from crisis, we didn’t lose sight of the distinctive needs and opportunities within different communities.

One of the most important lessons was the need to create space for reflection, even during high-pressure moments. It’s counterintuitive when everything feels urgent, but taking time to think strategically is essential. I used ADEPT networks to explore emerging issues and co-develop solutions, using collective intelligence and experience of peers facing similar challenges. I also ensured that short-term decisions aligned with the long-term vision for place.

During Covid, ADEPT’s weekly calls became a lifeline - a space for shared learning and solidarity. I remember one member saying: “This is the most connected I’ve felt in my career.” That comment stayed with me. It was a testament to the power of collective leadership and a reminder that even in the darkest times we need each other.

Those calls weren’t just about sharing information or coordinating responses. They were about human connection, about knowing you weren’t alone in facing impossible decisions, about drawing strength from colleagues who truly understood what you were going through.

Reflecting on what has mattered most during times of significant change, three qualities stand out:

- Adaptability - being open to change and learning. The leaders who thrived were those who could learn quickly, pivot when needed and embrace new ways of working.
- Collaboration - working across boundaries and sectors. The best outcomes came from bringing together different perspectives, expertise and resources across traditional silos.
- Resilience - maintaining focus and energy despite setbacks. There were difficult days, but resilience meant picking ourselves up, supporting our teams and continuing to move forward with purpose.

Leading though future change

Some things remain constant in good place leadership. Listening to communities is fundamental - we serve residents and their voices must shape what we do. Building strong partnerships creates the conditions for success that extend far beyond what any single organisation can achieve. And staying grounded in values and purpose ensures that even when the context shifts, we remain focused on what truly matters.

I often think about the concept of being a good ancestor. It challenges us to make decisions with future generations in mind, to prioritise sustainability, equity and legacy. Our responsibility is to leave behind systems that are adaptable and inclusive, that will serve communities not just today, but decades from now.

To those stepping into place leadership roles, my advice is this: be curious and courageous. Invest in relationships - they’re your greatest asset. Don’t be afraid to challenge the status quo. Some of the most significant improvements in how we deliver services have come from questioning ‘the way we’ve always done things’ and having the courage to do things differently.

Place leadership in times of change requires us to be adaptive, collaborative and resilient. It demands that we hold steady while remaining flexible, support our teams while driving transformation and stay focused on long-term purpose while responding to immediate needs.

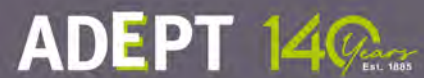
Looking ahead, I believe ‘place’ will become more digital, decentralised, and climate conscious. The role of place leaders will expand to include data, innovation and citizen engagement in ways we’re only beginning to imagine.

In the future, the concept of place will continue to evolve, but the need for thoughtful leadership will remain. The fundamentals of listening, collaborating and leading with purpose will endure even as the tools and context change.

My message to ADEPT members is this: ‘thank you for your commitment to public service’. In an era of increasing complexity, your dedication to communities, your willingness to innovate and your collaborative spirit make an enormous difference.

We need to continue to lead with integrity, creativity and compassion. The next 140 years start with us - let’s make them count!

3. True local empowerment: reflections on restructuring, capacity and the role of ADEPT



Rupert Clubb, Past President of ADEPT (2016-17) and Director of Communities, Economy & Transport at East Sussex County Council.



Rupert Clubb

“ Place means different things to different people, but at its core, it’s about ‘the things that enable people to put their best foot forward’.”

Local empowerment is a concept that resonates deeply within communities and organisations alike. It is about giving power back to the people, ensuring that decisions are made closer to those they affect. In this article, I reflect on what true local empowerment looks like, the challenges faced and the role of ADEPT in influencing government reform agendas.

I first became involved in ADEPT in 2008-09, around the time it was changing its name from CSS to ADEPT. This change reflected the broadening and changing roles of place directors. For me, this led to becoming more involved in ADEPT, initially chairing the environment board and ultimately leading to becoming ADEPT President in 2016-17.

The importance of place

Place means different things to different people, but at its core, it’s about ‘the things that enable people to put their best foot forward’.

This includes the broadband that powers their alarm clocks, the waste disposal when they put the bins out, the bus they catch to work, the library book they return, the footpath they walk on, or the roads they cycle or drive on - and, crucially, how safe they are. It is about the quality and access of the countryside around them, and the access to skills and jobs. It is all the things that support residents, visitors and businesses in their day-to-day lives. It is inescapable. So much so that some of our services are there both at the happiest and the saddest times in people’s lives.

Looking back over my career it is difficult to single out one thing to be proud of because there are so many and this highlights the broad range of our role. How can you draw comparison between the opening of say, a library, to the construction of a new waste facility, or the support to bereaved families through our registration service and implementation of bus priority measures?

The single theme throughout our diverse portfolio is the people that make it happen, the staff of our authorities that go beyond every day. I am proud of what they have achieved against an incredibly difficult backdrop.

Challenges and evolution

Meanwhile my biggest challenge - in fact, our biggest challenge - has been, and continues to be, making the best of the money available. It is a complicated financial outlook that makes managing expectations a significant challenge.

Fortunately, ADEPT has evolved to reflect these growing challenges. The inclusion of corporate members has been an important development, because public authorities cannot deliver for our residents and businesses without the private sector. They are an important voice as part of the ADEPT message.

The relationship with our corporate partners illustrates the broader point about the importance of relationships to successful place outcomes. Building strong relationships with partners, both public and private, is essential for shaping place.

Devolution and local empowerment

Local empowerment is about more than just shifting power; it is about making meaningful changes that benefit communities. By focusing on true local empowerment, engaging with communities, and ensuring that devolution delivers real benefits, we can create a better future for all. ADEPT’s role in influencing government reforms is vital in this process, ensuring that the place agenda remains a priority.

True local empowerment is about working with communities, building relationships with them, to understand and help shape their place. It means that local leaders are empowered to make decisions that work well for their areas, rather than having decisions imposed from a central authority.

More local decision making means, in theory, solutions can be tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of their communities. This leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes, as the decisions are made by those who have a deep understanding of the local context.

Devolution provides an opportunity for local leaders to decide what works best for their areas. To ensure it delivers real benefits, it is crucial to focus on the needs of the residents and not just shift bureaucracy around. This involves engaging with the community, understanding their needs and making informed decisions that improve their quality of life.

Even though empowering local leaders is positive, it will be essential to strike a balance between local decision-making and central oversight to ensure that communities receive the best possible outcomes.

When local leaders have the autonomy to make decisions, they can respond more quickly, effectively and innovatively to local issues and opportunities.

ADEPT’s role and the future

ADEPT’s influence has brought about significant changes to local authority funding and has influenced policy. This has had a significant impact on how we deliver services and support our communities.

People in our communities will always have strong views about services that support their daily lives. The nature of the service may evolve, but I have no doubt people and politicians will remain animated about place.

To shape place effectively, ADEPT members should keep focused on developing strong relationships with the partners needed to shape place. This changes over time and needs investment to pay the future dividend.

Future ADEPT members will also need to embrace potential tools that can help achieve more for less and be open to technological changes. I would urge people to get involved in the regional and subject matter boards, which have a real impact on national policy development.

For ADEPT, the role is as important as ever. ADEPT needs to ensure that the place agenda is not diluted by other pressures, notably in adult and children’s social care. These are issues that need to be resolved by government but not at the expense of the very services that keep communities thriving and proud of the place they call home.

Good place thinking supports communities economically, socially and environmentally, but it needs to be funded appropriately. It is crucial for ADEPT to continue playing a significant role in shaping future government reforms.

In conclusion, true local empowerment involves giving power back to the people, building the capacity of local leaders and communities and ensuring that decisions are made closer to those they affect. By focusing on the needs and priorities of local communities, engaging with residents and ensuring transparency and accountability, we can ensure that devolution delivers real benefits. ADEPT’s role in advocating for local empowerment and ensuring place remains a priority in this process, helping to create a better future for all.

4. From potholes to smart roads: local highways and the future of infrastructure



Ann Carruthers, Past President of ADEPT (2024-25) and Director of Environment and Transport, Leicestershire County Council.



Ann Carruthers

“ Be open minded, up for innovation, and challenge ourselves to think differently about how place services facilitate thriving communities. Have bags of perseverance and resilience - you’re going to need it, but the rewards are worth it.



I first started getting involved in ADEPT about 10 years ago as Assistant Director at Leicestershire County Council and began attending and later chairing the Transport and Connectivity Board meetings. Through this work I’ve come to see place as the cohesive, functioning, vibrant and resilient communities we work hard to create and support with the delivery of our place based services.

Over my career there have been some real changes in how we manage highways. Firstly, our road and transport systems are all much busier as we travel more and have more vehicles. That puts additional demands on the transport networks we provide and public expectation on how that performs, has certainly risen. Secondly, as the level of funding has not kept up with inflation, we have struggled to invest the way we would have wanted with the resultant consequences.

Throughout my career, one of the biggest challenges has been catering for all the demands for travel and transport from the public, business and industry as well as the other infrastructure providers (utility companies etc) who need access to our road system. This has meant we are increasingly looking at innovative solutions, be that new materials that have a lower carbon impact, or implementing digital and AI based solutions to improve efficiencies and drive better outcomes and moving away from traditional models of providing transport.

Managing ageing infrastructure

The challenge of maintaining our highway networks has intensified significantly. More traffic usage, heavier vehicles, a changing climate, more utilities digging up our roads, and of course less money in real terms, means it has become a much harder job. For most authorities the money is spread too thinly - we simply can’t invest in the way we want in preventative treatments that will make a difference to the condition of the highway.

While politicians and government are fixated with potholes, we know tackling potholes is not simply the answer to a well maintained network. The propensity over the last few decades of providing capital for new infrastructure, but not sufficiently funding maintenance of existing infrastructure has only exacerbated the issue. Ultimately network condition is declining; however, if there is a silver lining, it’s that we’ve all had to be more innovative.

Digital transformation and asset management

When it comes to using digital and AI technology, we are currently only at the tip of the iceberg. As tech advances, I have no doubt we will be far more efficient in how we manage our assets. The value of research and development initiatives such as the DfT funded Live Labs 2 are invaluable in this space. 150-odd local highway authorities can’t all trial the latest advances, we don’t have the time or resource, so programmes like Live Labs 2 do that for us and reduce the risk, so we can make best use of our limited funding and smart investment.

Through my role in ADEPT, I was invited to present to about 30 of the key leaders across our sector on the challenges of maintaining our roads as a highway authority. At the end of my presentation, a key DfT representative expressed surprise that the majority of local highway authorities and many councils are unable to afford even basic structural maintenance or upgrades. A new Structures Fund is being introduced for LHAs from April 2026. I like to think ADEPT had just a wee bit of a role here and believe that our voice has been heard by those able to act to help - it shows that government takes ADEPT seriously.

Devolution and the future of local transport powers

Looking to the future, while local authorities already have significant local transport powers, the key to great placemaking will be genuine integration between transport and land use planning. I don’t think the current system really allows that.

I believe local government reform for the areas that don’t have it will certainly move us forward. While devolution only really gives additional transport powers for bus franchising, the real opportunity from devolution that is hugely relevant to our placemaking world, is the ability to pull in greater levels of investment. Then, crucially, make strategic investment decisions through the Spatial Development Strategy process to really be in charge of our own place shaping destiny. Perhaps that will be our legacy.

I think we are now far more open to trialling and implementing innovation. We know roads and transport are only an enabler to vibrant communities, a strong economy and good quality of life so how we achieve that is not set in stone and we are certainly demonstrating a real appetite to continuously learn, adapt and deliver.

We have just seen the 200th anniversary of our railways. The Victorians knew how to build a legacy, so ADEPT’s 140-year anniversary is timely. Our challenge is how we adapt what we have to meet tomorrow’s needs and create a culture of adaptation and resilience for future place leaders.

Reflections on place leadership

Looking back over my career, I’m most proud of being president of ADEPT! The conversations we’ve had with government Ministers, senior civil servants and the leaders of many other sectors have helped move us forward on our ambition of creating better places. I’m also really pleased with the progress we have seen over the last couple of decades in moving from being traditionally male-dominated services. It’s great not to be the only female in the room!

My advice to the next generation of place leaders? Be open minded, up for innovation and challenge ourselves to think differently about how place services facilitate thriving communities. Have bags of perseverance and resilience - you’re going to need it, but the rewards are worth it.

Working in place at times can be tough, but what we do really does make a difference to our residents every day. Our founding ADEPT (CSS) members have left us a real legacy, as have the generations of place leaders since and we too will do. You do a fabulous job, so keep on doing it!

As a final reflection, I fell into a career in highways and transport by complete accident, (it wasn’t called place then) - I have however, always been thankful this is where I ended up.

5. How local services can lead the circular economy



Paula Hewitt, Past President of ADEPT (2021-22) and former Place Director at Somerset County Council.



Paula Hewitt

“ ‘Place’ means to me ‘communities and all the services that communities collectively need to function well’ - economy, waste, transport, natural environment, planning and water management, to name a few. ”

When I first became involved with ADEPT, I was a Director at Somerset County Council. I had responsibility for a wide range of Place Services at Somerset County Council, but my passion was environmental services, resulting in me chairing the ADEPT Environment Board.

Since leaving local government, I have remained active in the environment sector as Independent Chair of the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and through the South West Infrastructure Partnership. For me, ADEPT was a fantastic network of professionals where I could share ideas and learn from others.

‘Place’ means to me ‘communities and all the services that communities collectively need to function well’ - economy, waste, transport, natural environment, planning and water management, to name a few.

Looking back, one of the moments I’m most proud of in terms of place leadership was how Somerset Council and our partners responded to the devastating floods of 2014. It was a reminder that effective place leadership is about bringing people, communities and services together including in times of intense pressure - and then learning from those experiences to build long-term resilience.

That same mindset underpins how we’ve approached waste and the circular economy: thinking systemically, planning for the future and building partnerships that last.

The evolution of waste management

When I joined local government in 1991, I worked in a ‘two-tier’ area where household waste was collected in black bags by district councils and the county council was responsible for disposal. There was no attempt to separate out recyclables and all disposal was to landfill. Over my career, there has been a huge transformation to more integrated collection and disposal services - and a shift in seeing waste as a resource.

I recall the introduction of wheelie bins and then recyclables being separated from residual waste for treatment and recycling. Very little waste is now landfilled and Energy from Waste plants have become much more widespread alongside plants to digest our food waste. Another shift has been the move away from weekly residual waste collections, as more and more waste is recycled.

In Somerset, I was involved in creating a waste partnership of all the district councils and the county council. This provided an integrated waste service and introduced a weekly kerbside sorted recyclable collection including for

food waste. This enabled us to move to fortnightly residual waste collection and then to three weekly collections, with widespread community support. I still remember the outrage from Eric Pickles when he was the Secretary of State that every household would not get their rubbish collected every week - how things have changed!

Another change has been an increased emphasis on recycling at Household Waste Disposal Sites or ‘tips’ as they used to be called. These are increasingly referred to as Household Recycling Sites. On the journey we have seen many changes some temporary and others reversed, including some authorities charging for entry to sites or to dispose of some materials and some introducing permits as they struggled to manage their budgets.

During the Covid Pandemic there were some real challenges in continuing to provide a waste service whilst protecting the workforce. I loved the innovations that were put in place by our contractors - it was really clear that residents really appreciated that the service continued to operate.

There have been many legislation and policy changes along the way, including the introduction of landfill tax and the move to more producer responsibility. I’m sure I’m not alone in recalling the ‘fridge mountains’ when legislation on CFCs was brought in. More change will come, perhaps relating to deposit return schemes?

Innovation and impact

The introduction of the waste hierarchy and the shift from seeing waste as something to be got rid of, to seeing it as a resource - and the resulting shift in public attitudes - has had a huge impact.

I knew this had really taken hold when we started to receive requests to expand the materials which could be recycled at the kerbside and when communities accepted three weekly residual waste collections as the way to fund offering a wider recycling service,

The transformation required is really a shift in mindset across the system - from producers (for example, of packaging), and residents, to the local authority and its contractors. It’s about maximising the value of the materials and applying the waste hierarchy of prevention, re-use, recycle, other recovery and - only after these options have been exhausted - disposal.

Changing resident behaviour takes time, but using ‘nudge theory’ can really help. We want recycling to be seen as the norm - when most people on a street recycle, new residents are more likely to do the same.

In Somerset, we ran a really successful education programme with primary schools. We found that the children took home the recycling message and encouraged their parents to recycle.

Throughout my career, financial pressures were a constant driver for innovation - the need to do more with less was an ongoing theme. There was an ongoing requirement to innovate and re-engineer to deliver this. Being part of the ADEPT network was a great way of learning about how others were doing this and then applying this in my authority.

Future challenges

Among our future challenges for the future is that the market for plastic waste and its recycling in the UK is still underdeveloped. This continues to present challenges with ensuring plastic waste collected from householders is recycled and will require investment. The government’s plans to make recycling more consistent across the country will have significant impacts for some areas, especially where contracts need to be amended.

Another ongoing challenge is improving the quality of recyclables collected - contamination due to poor sorting can still lead to whole loads being rejected.

Waste is one of a few service areas that is used by every household and is therefore a ‘doorstep issue’ for councillors - everyone has a view - good or bad!

As place leaders, we have a responsibility not just to manage services for today, but to think like good ancestors - ensuring that the decisions we make now leave things in a better state for future generations.

The next generation of place leaders will face new challenges, but my advice would be to stay connected to your communities, be bold in your innovation, and make full use of networks like ADEPT - for learning, for support and for fun.

6. Place leadership and planning



Anthony Payne, Past President of ADEPT (2023-24) and former Place Director of Plymouth City Council.



Anthony Payne

“ Shaping places is about making them liveable, fit for purpose and preparing them for the challenges ahead. It’s about making them as vibrant, as safe, and as inclusive as they can be. ”

I spent 15 years as Place Director in Plymouth, where I oversaw the creation and development of the Place Department and led the city’s growth agenda. My connection with ADEPT began around 2011, when a former colleague encouraged me to get involved.

Defining place

The term ‘place’ emerged in local government largely due to financial pressures and the amalgamation of services. But what could have been merely a bureaucratic response became something more valuable: bringing together the range of functions that impact the liveability of communities.

Shaping places is about making them liveable, fit for purpose and preparing them for the challenges ahead. It’s about making them as vibrant, as safe, and as inclusive as they can be. While times change and challenges evolve, the fundamental principles and qualities that make good places remain similar but evolve with time and new ways of living such as the ever increasing importance of digital connectivity.

Local plans

Local plans provide the essential framework from which all policies, strategies and actions in a local authority flow. The Plymouth Local Plan, for example, brought together policies and strategies across the city to shape growth from multiple perspectives - spatial, economic, regeneration, environmental, public health and education service provision.

The problem is that many local plans are outdated and no longer reflect current needs or the challenges of the next decade. Where plans aren’t refreshed and renewed, they become less relevant and less effective as tools for shaping the future. In developing Plymouth’s local plan, we consulted extensively. Yet even with this effort, we only reached a fraction of residents- this can obviously lead to friction later down the line, as there are still strong objections, even when development aligns with the adopted plan.

There’s a real disconnect between strategic and long-term planning and local reaction. Single-issue agendas do not always appreciate and balance out much wider, complex agendas and challenges and their inter-relationships. One of the key strengths of local plans is their ability to join up agendas and seek the best outcomes across competing priorities - but this holistic view isn’t always appreciated.

Balancing local needs with national targets

The ambition to increase housing numbers is laudable. However, the reality is stark: tightly bounded authorities with limited land availability will struggle to meet their individual targets. Government shouldn’t be fixated on numbers in each specific place, but should look at them across a broader spatial canvas.

This is why spatial development strategies - reminiscent of structure plans or regional planning approaches - make sense. What goes around comes around and the demise of regional planning from the early 2000s now seems to be reversing. A more strategic approach across larger geographies can better justify housing allocation, while minimising local protectionism.

Equally important is supporting brownfield regeneration. The costs associated with brownfield development are significant and developers cannot always cover them. Government needs to reconsider gap funding for brownfield remediation, something the Blair government and Regional Development Agencies did effectively. If schemes become profitable beyond a certain threshold, clawback mechanisms can return funds to the public purse.

In terms of public engagement, all voices can be heard, but not all voices can be satisfied. Planning involves balancing a complexity of competing interests, and sometimes the interests of certain groups must be foregone for broader benefits.

I think back to Local Agenda 21 from the 1992 Earth Summit - a mechanism for community engagement on sustainable development outside statutory frameworks. UK authorities were good at producing these strategies, but poor at delivery. When abandoned, engagement became more ad hoc, leaving people feeling unheard. Local Agenda 21 plans did provide a mechanism to listen to and consider broad interests across environmental, economic and social issues.

Planning reform - opportunities and considerations

I welcome several aspects of current planning reform, including greater flexibility on fee charging, which will help local planning authorities. As well as this, mandatory training for planning committee members is vital - understanding the intricacies and interrelationships across agendas ensures decisions are made against policy. It should reinforce a policy led approach to decisions, leading to more appropriate outcomes.

The development of national policies (National DM policies) in particular areas will be beneficial in my view e.g. listed buildings where a national approach could make sense. But, they need to be developed in agreement with local government. However, we must be thoughtful as to which policies are nationally created and ensure that local context and local policy is not lost, bearing in mind to develop local plans with our communities. There needs to be balance between nationally set and locally agreed policies.

Principles for future leaders

Despite the complexity of modern local government, certain principles remain constant. These include ensuring policy integration horizontally across departments and vertically with other government tiers. Work in cooperation and partnership - if you’re doing it alone, you’re doing it wrong. Consider the economic, environmental and social impacts of every decision, minimising negative environmental effects.

Looking back over my career, I’m most proud of two things. First, delivering numerous projects and schemes that will shape and enable the growth and development of places over the next 20 to 30 years. This work has long-term value that extends far beyond any individual tenure.

Second, during unprecedented public sector financial challenges, in Plymouth we created a place department that brought together diverse service areas, promoting growth as a mechanism to compensate for lost core funding. The income generated actually allowed the department to grow, building capacity and skills needed to deliver on place ambitions, demonstrating that even in austere times, strategic thinking and integrated working can create conditions for success.

My advice to the next generation? Draw upon the expertise within your authorities and key partners. Everyone is in it together, public and private. This isn’t easy. Everyone thinks they can do it better than you. But ultimately, you should be proud of what you achieve in shaping places for future generations.

7. Green foundations: nature, place and the climate challenge



Andy Gutherson, 2nd Vice President of ADEPT and Executive Director of Place at Lincolnshire County Council.



Andy Gutherson

“ When balancing competing priorities like housing delivery, economic growth and environmental protection in decision making, I believe a focus on assessment of options, consideration of risks and cost benefit of outcomes is needed.



For me, ‘place’ represents a sense of belonging and identity. The creation of long-lasting legacy - physical, environmentally, economically and socially - now means ensuring that legacy can withstand the climate shocks ahead and actively contribute to nature recovery. The physical impact of what we do is very closely aligned with planning outcomes and this connection between the natural and built environment has become increasingly critical as we face an increase in the number of and impact of extreme weather events.

How climate change and biodiversity have shaped place leadership

Climate change and biodiversity have fundamentally reshaped the role of place directors. The outcomes required to be delivered from legislative frameworks have transformed how we approach every aspect of place-making. We’ve moved to a position where environmental considerations were one factor among many, to a context where they must underpin every decision we make.

The increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events has exposed vulnerabilities in our infrastructure and communities. Flooding in particular has taught us that traditional grey infrastructure alone cannot protect our communities - we need nature-based solutions, sustainable drainage systems and land use planning that works with water, rather than against it. Building greater climate resilience into our planning means fundamentally rethinking how we design places.

Working in Lincolnshire, land was reclaimed to create the Fenlands which now help to feed the nation. However, the risks associated with the sustainability of the coastal defences raise the spectre of the sea re-establishing its primacy - this is in a county where a third of the land mass is at or below sea-level. Arguably, this is our biggest local challenge.

However, the biggest barriers to delivering net zero at local level remain substantial challenges for all of us. Political commitment is wavering, so in a world of increasing pressure on local government resources, tackling the impacts of climate change is seemingly becoming a decreasing priority.

The cost and resource commitment required is considerable, while long-term strategy commitment, including statutory provision for climate change, is required if we are to make meaningful progress.

Nature recovery and local energy planning

Local Nature Recovery Strategies represent an opportunity to embed nature into the heart of local planning and decision making. The biodiversity net gain requirement has required us to adapt our processes and assessment of what we do. I don’t believe it has changed our approach fundamentally, as we have previously sought to balance environmental impacts and concerns, but it has prioritised, formalised and strengthened our commitment to nature recovery. Local energy area and infrastructure planning is equally critical to our net zero ambitions.

There is, however, an increasing level of challenge to the infrastructure requirements associated with meeting the net zero ambitions especially when associated with the government’s clean energy agenda. There is significant push back by local communities to what is perceived as the industrialisation of rural landscapes in order to introduce solar farms, wind farms, battery storage (BESS) and other associated infrastructure such as inter connectors, pylon runs and electricity substations. The balance between delivering long term energy solutions and energy security is creating increased tensions at a local level.

Much of this infrastructure is being introduced into areas where the cost-of-living increases, to which energy costs contribute significantly, are being felt most. To date, those communities are not seeing how this infrastructure provides a direct benefit to them or their community.

When balancing competing priorities like housing delivery, economic growth and environmental protection in decision making, I believe a focus on assessment of options, consideration of risks and cost benefit of outcomes is needed. This balance has become more complex as climate imperatives have grown more urgent, but it remains essential to our work as place leaders.

What this means for place directors

The role of place directors has evolved from focusing primarily on the physical fabric of places to becoming climate and nature leaders. We need new skills, new partnerships and new ways of thinking.

I have seen ADEPT’s role and position evolve significantly. The organisation has moved away from an engineering-centred organisation to a more rounded and multi-disciplinary body embracing a range of challenges and opportunities. There is an increasing position of influence within the place arena particularly on climate and nature issues.

The future of place

Looking back over my career, what I’m most proud of when I consider the idea of ‘place leadership’ is being a mentor and role model to the next generation of planners and place leaders. Those coming behind us will inherit not just our built environment, but our climate legacy.

In terms of being good ancestors, we must leave a legacy not a liability. We must respect what we were left and ensure we pass it on to others. This is particularly true when it comes to climate action - the decisions we make today about nature, energy, and resilience will shape the lives of generations to come.

In this globalised world, the concept of place has expanded, making more locations accessible, both physically and virtually. Yet at the same time, our local areas - where we live and work - have become increasingly important to our sense of pride, belonging and mental wellbeing. And as climate impacts intensify, the resilience and quality of our local environment will increasingly determine our quality of life.

My advice to the next generation of place leaders is to be ambitious, honest, confident and innovative. Be true to your values and beliefs. Look to leave a legacy. Embrace the climate challenge not as a constraint but as an opportunity to create healthier, more resilient communities.

In spite of the complexity of the place agenda and the uncertainty of global events and political turbulence, we all still have an important role to play. As custodians of the place, we need to stand up for our individual and collective beliefs - particularly when it comes to protecting nature and delivering on our climate commitments for future generations.

8. People make place: skills, inclusion and future leadership



Neil Gibson, Past President of ADEPT (2018-19) and Chair of the Live Labs 2 Commissioning Board.



Neil Gibson

“ ‘Place’ is like writing the score and conducting the orchestra: about bringing many moving parts together - people, services, communities, partners and environments. ”

I joined ADEPT’s President Team in 2010 when ADEPT was formed from the County Surveyors Society in 2010. Since then, I’ve served as its Treasurer, President and now sit on the Leadership Team as chair of the Live Labs 2 Commissioning Board.

My career as an Executive Director for Place has given me both a deep appreciation of the challenges and opportunities that strong, confident place leadership can create. ‘Place’ is like writing the score and conducting the orchestra: about bringing many moving parts together - people, services, communities, partners and environments.

ADEPT members are central to this task. Working with their local politicians and their communities, they see the big-picture challenges and opportunities in their places, mapping the way forward through the inevitable complexity to make a difference. Constantly shifting political, environmental, technological and financial contexts mean place leaders must keep revisiting the skills and competencies needed to succeed.

Closing skills gaps and building future leaders

One clear challenge for ADEPT members is finding space to think strategically and outside the box. Partnerships such as those with Amey - the Excellence in Place Leadership (EIPL) and the Pioneering, Action-orientated, Creative and Entrepreneurial (PACE) programmes with SOLACE (the **Leadership Pathway Programme** and the **Leadership Development Programme**) and with Colas/ Multiverse (**Digital Academy**) help provide that space to learn and develop the skills that future place leadership demands.

We are also pushing innovation through initiatives like the Live Labs 2 programme on decarbonising local highways. The Future Highways Research Group, a collaboration with Proving Services, is a growing network providing the opportunity to develop and test innovative solutions to sector challenges

But future leadership is not just about developing skills. It’s about ensuring that the next generation of leaders is diverse, representative and excited to build careers in local government. Competing with the private sector for Gen Z talent is a challenge, but projects like the **‘Find Your Path’** recruitment campaign show how we can reframe careers in local government to be relevant, dynamic and purposeful.

Inclusive leadership and the power of story

Inclusion sits at the heart of place leadership. The 2024 PACE thought leadership programme highlighted how essential it is for leaders to articulate a shared sense of place - for themselves, their partners, their stakeholders and their communities. These many interpretations must be brought together to achieve a commonality and sense of place that can be understood and shared by all. Only then can place leaders build a collective unified purpose, working with partners to share messages and advocate for their places.

Storytelling is a powerful tool. It allows leaders to make sense of complex challenges and give communities the belief that change is possible. Listening to your audience helps to create your story, but offers wider benefits to truly understand the place and its communities. Storytelling was used creatively by Barnsley Council to provide inclusive leadership as it emerged from a difficult period in its history, to write a new narrative with its communities. That is inclusive leadership in action: not only delivering, but ensuring people genuinely feel part of the journey.

ADEPT’s **‘A Place for All’** campaign, delivered in partnership with Colas, also demonstrates how storytelling can transform workplaces. The campaign shared personal stories exploring real experiences of equality, diversity and inclusion across the sector, with the aim of fostering greater inclusivity.

The leadership qualities of tomorrow

Place leadership will look different in the future. Technical expertise will always matter, but increasingly it is the strategic qualities - curiosity, evidence-based thinking, ambition for change and the ability to tell a compelling story - that will define success.

Place will remain a complex political ecosystem of diverse communities and people, the built environment and geography, economy and technology, and history and culture. Bringing all these interconnected elements together is an incredibly difficult process, but as local government will continue to face unprecedented budgetary and political pressures, the need for strong and tenacious place leaders has never been more vital.

Leaders will need to:

- **Frame the big picture** - understanding what makes their places tick and being bold about the changes needed.
- **Be storytellers** - winning over local politicians, investors and communities with honesty and vision.
- **Develop empowered cultures** - organisations that measure success by outcomes, are customer focused, and embrace collaboration.
- **Harness technology and AI** - not as bolt-ons, but as core enablers to deliver faster, smarter, more citizen-focused services.

Resilience and tenacity will remain constants, as pressures on budgets, politics and communities will not ease. But place leadership has always been about navigating turbulence with creativity and courage.

How will the concept of place change?

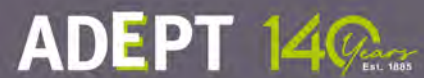
The concept of place has always been central to geography - a space with meaning, shaped by people and context. Understanding the history of our places will remain important to how we see how both past and present will shape the future. The past is still visible in the built environment and the spaces between, and in the changing heritage and culture of the people who live there. The latter will always create the feel of a place and its sense of cohesion and ownership, as much as its physical form and demographics.

The three key components of place: location, locale, and a sense of place, can be applied at any scale and do not have to be fixed in time or space. With continuing globalisation, we will see the concept of place change as its physical setting and cultures are influenced by new ideas and technologies.

Final reflections

Across its 140-year history, ADEPT has continually evolved - and it must continue to do so. Its role is to remain connected to its members, to campaign nationally, and to create the networks, opportunities and programmes that help its leaders stay relevant and resilient. So my message to ADEPT members in this anniversary year is simple: get involved and make a difference. It’s your association. And my advice to future leaders is simple: invest in people. The places of tomorrow will be shaped less by the technical brilliance of individuals and more by the collective capacity of diverse, skilled and motivated teams.

9. Prosperous places: economic leadership and inclusive regeneration



Darryl Evers, Past President of ADEPT (2019-20), Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills, Staffordshire County Council.



Darryl Evers

“ ‘Place’ may not include every service a council delivers, but it influences how we live, work and connect with each other. How we succeed and thrive, for me it is where policy meets people. ”

When I look back on my career, I’ve always thought of ‘place’ as something tangible, the things people can touch and feel every day. From the roads we travel on and the parks we enjoy, to the employment sites, libraries and public spaces that knit communities together, these are the universal services that everyone accesses. In essence, they are the fabric of our daily lives.

As Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills at Staffordshire County Council and during my time as ADEPT President in 2019-20, I’ve come to see that the role of local government in shaping these everyday experiences is both a privilege and a responsibility. ‘Place’ may not include every service a council delivers, but it influences how we live, work and connect with each other. How we succeed and thrive, for me is where policy meets people.

Leadership, collaboration and community

One of the moments I’m most proud of during my time as ADEPT President was trying to bring together the different bodies that represent local government, ADEPT, ADASS, ADCS, ADPH and the LGA, to speak with one voice to government. Too often, we were each arguing for our own slice of the pie, when in reality we should have been arguing for a bigger pie. Collaboration will always be how we deliver more for our communities.

That collaborative and creative approach has translated directly into my day job. A challenge from our new Director of Children’s Services led us to ask a simple but powerful question: are we, in the ‘place’ directorate, doing enough to support children in care? The honest answer was no. So, we challenged ourselves to think differently asking “what can we do, as a department, to improve opportunities for care leavers?”

The results have been wonderful to observe. From setting up business support programmes that encourage employers to offer apprenticeships to care leavers, to creating reuse hubs at our household waste recycling centres that give young people first choice of furniture and essentials when they move into their first homes. By thinking creatively and collaboratively, showing genuine inclusivity and demonstrating leadership ideals, we’ve made a huge impact at very little cost and made a real difference to people lives.

The constants in leadership

Good place leadership, in my view, transcends era and organisation, the fundamentals remain the same. Be an accessible, visible leader, empower your teams to innovate and work collectively to challenge systems that no longer serve communities well.

Leadership in place-based services is not about hierarchy, it’s about influence, collaboration and belief in the greater public good. When communities thrive, people are healthier, happier, safer and more successful. That, in turn, creates a more sustainable and affordable system for everyone. It’s an optimistic view, yes, but one that should underpin all we do in local government.

Economic resilience and regeneration

For me, economic resilience at a local level means creating an economy that can withstand shocks, whether that’s national policy change, recession or disruption to key services or sectors. It’s also about ensuring we’re not overly reliant on a single employer or industry.

I’ve seen the consequences when local economies depend too heavily on one sector, from the collapse of coal mining in the 1980s to the impact of public sector cuts after the financial crisis. Resilience comes from diversity and a healthy mix of sectors, job types and skills which help communities to weather the challenges that inevitably arise.

One project that stands out for me and really embodies that principle is i54 South Staffordshire, a brownfield site transformed through partnerships that created a thriving employment park for advanced manufacturing. With major employers like Jaguar Landrover and Moog, the site supports thousands of jobs across Staffordshire and the Black Country.

What made it succeed wasn’t just the investment it was the partnerships, the political will and the shared vision across councils and agencies, a belief in the potential of the final outcome. Regeneration takes time and conviction and holding firm to that long-term vision, especially through challenges and setbacks, is where true resilience lies in my opinion.

Inclusive growth

However, if we think of ‘place’ solely as infrastructure, I really think we miss the point. To ensure opportunities are available to all and that any growth benefits as many people as possible, we have to link investment in infrastructure with investment in people. Every regeneration or economic project should be accompanied by programmes that give local people the skills and support to access new opportunities.

At i54, for example, a dedicated skills programme helped our local residents prepare for the jobs that were being created, ensuring that growth didn’t bypass those who needed it most. True inclusivity comes when we design our places, projects and our partnerships around people as much as around new buildings or improved transport links.

The concept of ‘place’ is evolving. Digital connectivity has changed how communities form, evolve and interact physically and virtually. Yet I believe that our responsibility to each other remains largely the same, to ensure that the infrastructure and opportunities exist for all communities to thrive, however they’re connected.

Devolution and reform will continue to reshape how we work, redistributing the levers of influence and funding. In the future, local government and the next generation of place leaders will need to navigate this shifting landscape, broadening team skillsets to ensure economic leadership that taps every single possible resource.

A final reflection

One of the most important aspects of ADEPT’s work is the value in bringing place professionals together to share best practice and ideas. The opportunity to learn from each other and help drive agendas forward nationally cannot be underestimated. ADEPT also provides a unique space supporting future place leaders through their development programmes, helping them to prepare for future challenges and allowing them the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of others.

As place leaders, the decisions we make today will shape the choices available to those who come after us. Being a good ancestor means thinking long term about sustainability, inclusion, and opportunities that are accessible to everyone.

My advice to future place leaders is actually quite simple, be curious, collaborate and always remember that ‘place’ is about people. If we keep people at the heart of our decisions, we’ll build places and communities that endure.

10. Pathways to change: the active travel revolution and what’s next



Mark Kemp, Past President of ADEPT (2022-23) and former Place Director, Hertfordshire County Council.



Mark Kemp

“...active travel is the most basic form of travel and has been in existence since humans first took a step.”

I have been involved with ADEPT and its previous incarnation (CSS) since the early 2000s as an ADEPT member. I eventually became chair of the Transport and Connectivity Board and later joined the Leadership Team, serving as President in 2022-23.

Throughout that time, I have been fortunate to work with some forward-thinking local authorities - Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire - who truly understood that active travel is not an anti-car campaign, but a critical element of the transport solution which can make a significant health and wellbeing contribution to UK plc.

Rebalancing road space for active travel

In a society where, since the 1940s, the highway network has been designed to favour motorised transport, redressing the balance for active modes has been one of the more challenging tasks.

Short political cycles, and (an often understandable) resistance to change from the public, mean that difficult decisions are often delayed or deferred. Scare stories about the risks associated with cycleways in urban environments have been a constant challenge, but we need to recognise that some of this is driven by personal experience of poor cyclist behaviour - while many cyclists follow the highway code, in my mind, there is a clear need for better behaviour from some cyclists to reduce that anxiety.

At the start of the century, the active travel debate focused on new developments and providing additional capacity. Where that was not possible, shared facilities were the preferred solution - either cycle facilities on the edge of the road or shared footway/cycleways.

More recently, communities have been more willing to consider reallocation of road space effectively rebalancing the system and removing the car dominance in appropriate locations. The work that Active Travel England has developed has been very important in this area and, as Chair of the Transport and Connectivity Board, I was pleased to see the early push for ‘perfect solutions’ replaced with an element of pragmatism. When it comes to changing the way road space is used, we need to make sure that we do not make ‘perfect the enemy of the good’.

In my earlier career, I had been involved in some of the first Safer Routes to School projects. Creating an environment where our youngsters could benefit from a little exercise as they travelled to school, rather than being dropped off in a hurry right outside the school gate has had an enormous impact on the development of so many of our children.

I know that my own kids loved the 15 minute walk to school, the chat with mum or dad and the linking up with friends before they got into the school grounds. It also gave us a little exercise before we started our day and some precious time with the kids without other distractions.

These ideas are not new. In the first half of the 20th Century, Rees Jeffreys was delivering wayside stops so that travellers could pause their journey and enjoy a short walk in the countryside. Ebenezer Howard was delivering the first Garden Cities (Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City), which provided pleasant places where the feeling of space helped encourage a more active lifestyle. But somewhere along the line we lost direction and the car became king.

Health benefits and the future of active travel

One of the other challenges that we have faced in promoting active travel is the desire of those who want to resist change to argue that the choice is binary. Clearly this is not the case: active travel can be a whole journey, or part of a journey.

During my time at Cambridgeshire County Council, we were looking at Park and Cycle - providing car parks on the outskirts of the city with cycle storage locations, so that those travelling into the city on a regular basis could choose to cycle the last couple of miles. Not only would this improve their health through the exercise they were doing, but it would also help improve the air quality in the busier areas.

Indeed, over the years the arguments to support active travel have moved away from addressing congestion for travel time reasons, towards the significant health benefits for both the individual and the community.

Over the last 140 years we have seen such great strides in technology that can be used to support active travel. The flexibility in the way crossing lights can be controlled, the introduction of e-bikes and the development of motivational tools to encourage us all to get fitter.

But at the end of the day, active travel is the most basic form of travel and has been in existence since humans first took a step. So what might happen in the next 140 years? The recent changes to working patterns following the Covid pandemic suggest that people live more flexible lives and that will continue to develop, while robots and AI potentially take on the more repetitive processes. Who knows where the influence of AI will end, but if we just look at the growth in computing power over the last 100 years, the mind boggles.

I do worry that the move to cleaner energy for vehicles will mean that people are encouraged to go back to their cars and that short journeys will increase. This is the area that we all need to think about and the 15 minute city or 30 minute rural community have an important contribution to make to the place that we live in.

Let’s not go backwards but let’s embrace the need to share road space more equitably between the various modes that exist now and may exist in the future.

11. What next for place? The future of ADEPT and local place leadership



Andrew Cook, 1st Vice President of ADEPT, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director Growth, Highways & Infrastructure at Suffolk County Council.



Andrew Cook

“...‘place’ as an umbrella term is actually for me all about the people who live, work, shop or spend their leisure time in our locations, both urban and rural. Our role is to provide a fabric and services that facilitate and enhance people’s lives and experiences.”

I have been involved with ADEPT in various guises for approximately a dozen years. I am 1st Vice President and also Chair of the East of England Board. In the day job I have responsibility for Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport functions for Suffolk County Council and have held similar positions in other authorities.

That experience has given me a front-row seat to the evolution of local place leadership, from an era dominated by infrastructure and growth to one increasingly centred on people, resilience and wellbeing, and of course increasing fiscal restraint!

Ironically, ‘place’ as an umbrella term is actually for me all about the people who live, work, shop or spend their leisure time in our locations, both urban and rural. Our role is to provide a fabric and services that facilitate and enhance people’s lives and experiences. Place-based interventions can dramatically improve the quality of people’s experiences, whether this is traditional urban public realm and renewal schemes, or access to green open space in the countryside and everything in between.

In essence, place leadership is people leadership. Every decision we make about infrastructure, environment or transport should begin and end with the lived experience of the communities we serve.

The future of local leadership

I believe the next decade will bring a further acceleration of a trend that we have seen becoming more prevalent in the last few years. There is a need for our leadership to move away from traditional infrastructure and physical regeneration expertise and towards softer skills that see us respond collaboratively with other sectors to the challenges of society as we now find it.

Ageing residents, young people with greater needs, educational system deficiencies failing our employers and a growing social expectation that issues are ‘someone else’s problem’ to solve, rather than a collective endeavour - all these factors require a shift in how we lead.

Our biggest opportunity is our greatest challenge - how do we remain relevant to the people we serve as society rapidly evolves in the 21st century? Keeping pace with digital transformation, and how people consume services and information, will require a change in approach from place leaders, particularly to ensure that we can reach those in our society who are most in need of support.

As indicated above, making the link between people and place is key - how can the work that we do facilitate better outcomes for our communities and people, particularly those who need local authority support services the most? To thrive in this context, local leaders will need to act as connectors, bridging sectors, disciplines and communities, tackling issues of mobility, social cohesion and isolation along the way.

The future of ADEPT

The direction of travel is clear - ADEPT needs to continue to broaden its membership and continue engagement with other parts of the public sector. The need to illustrate the preventative power of place-based interventions that can improve outcomes for people and reduce health and care needs will be key. More social prescribing, more preservation and access to nature, more climate and air quality mitigation, and more holistic regeneration for our most deprived places.

The shift from piecemeal place-based interventions and services delivered on a shoestring following years of austerity, to a more holistic approach where place-based delivery is seen across the sector as a legitimate tool to reduce ‘people’ service demand, is about turning the tide of societal change and, as a result, is a generational undertaking.

We can play a central role in demonstrating that investing in place is an investment in prevention - in healthier, more resilient and more productive communities.

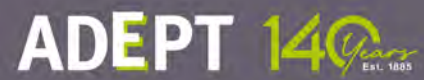
It’s easy to pick holes in the work of our predecessors with the benefit of hindsight, but there are a significant number of examples up and down the country where the drive for progress has left us with an historic legacy of physical division created by urban relief roads and dual carriageways. These have created separation for communities, accessibility issues for many residents and social problems arising from the poor urban fabric that abuts them.

As custodians of our communities, we need to ensure - either physically or digitally - that we don’t inadvertently leave the same negative legacy for our future communities. That means designing places that connect rather than divide, using data and technology responsibly and ensuring that our digital infrastructure enhances inclusion rather than deepening inequality.

My advice for future leaders is that ‘place’ is all about ‘people’. The next generation of place leaders will need courage to challenge the status quo, curiosity to learn from other sectors and compassion to keep people at the heart of every decision.

If ADEPT’s first 140 years have been about building and shaping places, the next 140 must be about enabling people and communities to flourish within them.

12. What next for place? The future of ADEPT and local place leadership



Katie Stewart, 2nd Vice President of ADEPT and Executive Director for Environment at the City of London Corporation.



Katie Stewart

I am responsible for place services and economic development within the Square Mile and beyond, from our 11,000 acres of green spaces across the south east from Hampstead Heath to Burnham Beeches, to the London Port Health Authority.

While I have gained a real appreciation for the many dimensions of place throughout my career, my passion for place comes down to its role in bringing people together. No matter how far technology goes to enable us to connect with one another and live digitally, as human beings we will never dispense with the need to be physically present and connect. The importance of place is in its power to connect people.

The next phase for place leadership and the wider sector

Regardless of the era, the critical factors in good place leadership remain the same: we need to be as market-facing as possible - in terms of the residents and businesses we serve, as well as the supply chains we engage. Policy and strategy only goes so far: it is results and impact on the ground on which we get measured. Only by engaging with those customers we serve and the industries with which we work can we really deliver the impact that our places deserve and expect.

Even in an increasingly digital world, the value of place will never diminish; rather, it will evolve and become increasingly multi-dimensional. Digital interaction with our physical world is bringing new layers and dimensions to how we engage with the physical world around us -that brings new opportunities, but also potential challenges.

I have had the privilege of working for ambitious authorities and the biggest persistent challenge is how to meet exceptionally high targets and expectations or standards of delivery - all while public sector budgets have been increasingly squeezed. It ultimately means we are seeking to deliver the best outcomes in the most efficient way for our 'shareholders' - our taxpayers - never losing the aspiration to always innovate and never stop trying to deliver the best we possibly can.

“ Even in an increasingly digital world, the value of place will never diminish; rather, it will evolve and become increasingly multi-dimensional. ”

My vision for ADEPT

I have been involved with ADEPT for around five years, and I have seen the organisation evolve and adapt to the realities of post-Covid working. We have risen to the challenge of using digital connectivity and engagement, while not losing the all-powerful opportunity to bring colleagues together, through conferences, award dinners and leadership courses.

ADEPT has delivered significant industry wide impact on policy and thinking, but for me its greatest strength is the professional network that ADEPT has built. Our conferences and in-person events create real camaraderie at a time when it is needed most.

For ADEPT to remain relevant and effective for future generations of place leaders, we must evolve to ensure that it can give its members what it needs in as flexible and agile a fashion as possible. The pressures on place directors have become, and will continue to become, ever greater, meaning place directors are some of the most time- and capacity-poor senior leaders in local government.

ADEPT needs to continue to be as clever as possible as to the moments and the ways in which it brings professionals together - maximising digital connectivity, but never losing the occasional moments to bring us all together in one... place!

How place leadership must evolve to meet future challenges

My vision for local leadership over the next 140 years is for the sector and local authorities to become truly agile and innovative. I'd love us to make the most of the data and technology we have and harness the sheer enthusiasm and energy of the people that work in our industry from across sectors.

How can we be good ancestors? Let's not back our future generations into a corner with places - either public realm or the structures we plan - as technology and the market around us will continue to change and evolve ever faster. It is critical that we enable our places to evolve as much as possible. Even the best schemes will need to be adapted and changed in future and to futureproof is to build flexibility into what we create today.

Looking forward, I see the biggest challenges place leaders will face will be our understanding of what communities want. It has become, and will continue to become, increasingly complex, and with that - as well as the financial constraints we are likely to continue to be under - we have to find ways of increasingly balancing a diverse range of expectations with limited resources.

It will sound clichéd, but technology and data now gives us the ability to be much more attuned to the needs of our communities and to tailor our services to those needs better than ever before. I see this as the greatest opportunity to transform how local government delivers for communities.

The next generation of place leaders

If I had to share just one insight during this anniversary year, it's that place leadership is not easy, but I strongly believe it is the single most rewarding career path in local government and beyond. While it's as tough as it gets to be accountable for so much and to so many in our communities, it is worth every drop of sweat, every tear and every all-nighter you spend as you work your way up your career.

My message to emerging leaders about shaping the future of place leadership is that the scope and purview of a place leader is so broad and diverse that you will never be an expert in everything you deliver. It is critical that you build an excellent team around you with the critical technical skills and competence you need. And never be afraid to own what you don't know.

Being a great place leader is about being part of a great place team - you cannot have one without the other, and your success is always a shared success with those of the professionals around you.

Gerry Leech, President of CSS 1980-81



Gerry Leech

“ I am proud to have played a part in shaping a piece of work that supported more consistent and reliable understanding of the condition of our highway network. ”

Former County Surveyor and Engineer, North Yorkshire County Council.

Leading the CSS

I had the privilege of serving as President of the CSS in 1980 during my time as County Surveyor and Engineer at North Yorkshire County Council, a role I held from 1970 to 1990.

Looking back, one of the professional highlights of my career was the development of the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey. It was a major undertaking at the time, involving every county in the country and I am proud to have played a part in shaping a piece of work that supported more consistent and reliable understanding of the condition of our highway network.

I also remember with great fondness the Annual Provincial Meeting each May. It was one of the few opportunities when all the County Surveyors, their deputies and their wives came together in the county of that year's President. The two days were always a pleasure, combining the chance to see the roads and bridges of the host county with the simple joy of renewing old friendships and building new ones.

In many ways it reflected what ADEPT continues today through its Spring and Autumn Conferences, where peers and colleagues gather to share knowledge, celebrate achievements and strengthen the relationships that sit at the heart of the profession.

Those occasions offered something very special. They were moments when the work, the people and the purpose of the service came together and I recall them with real gratitude.



Annual Provincial Meeting, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1985. President J W M Vallis.

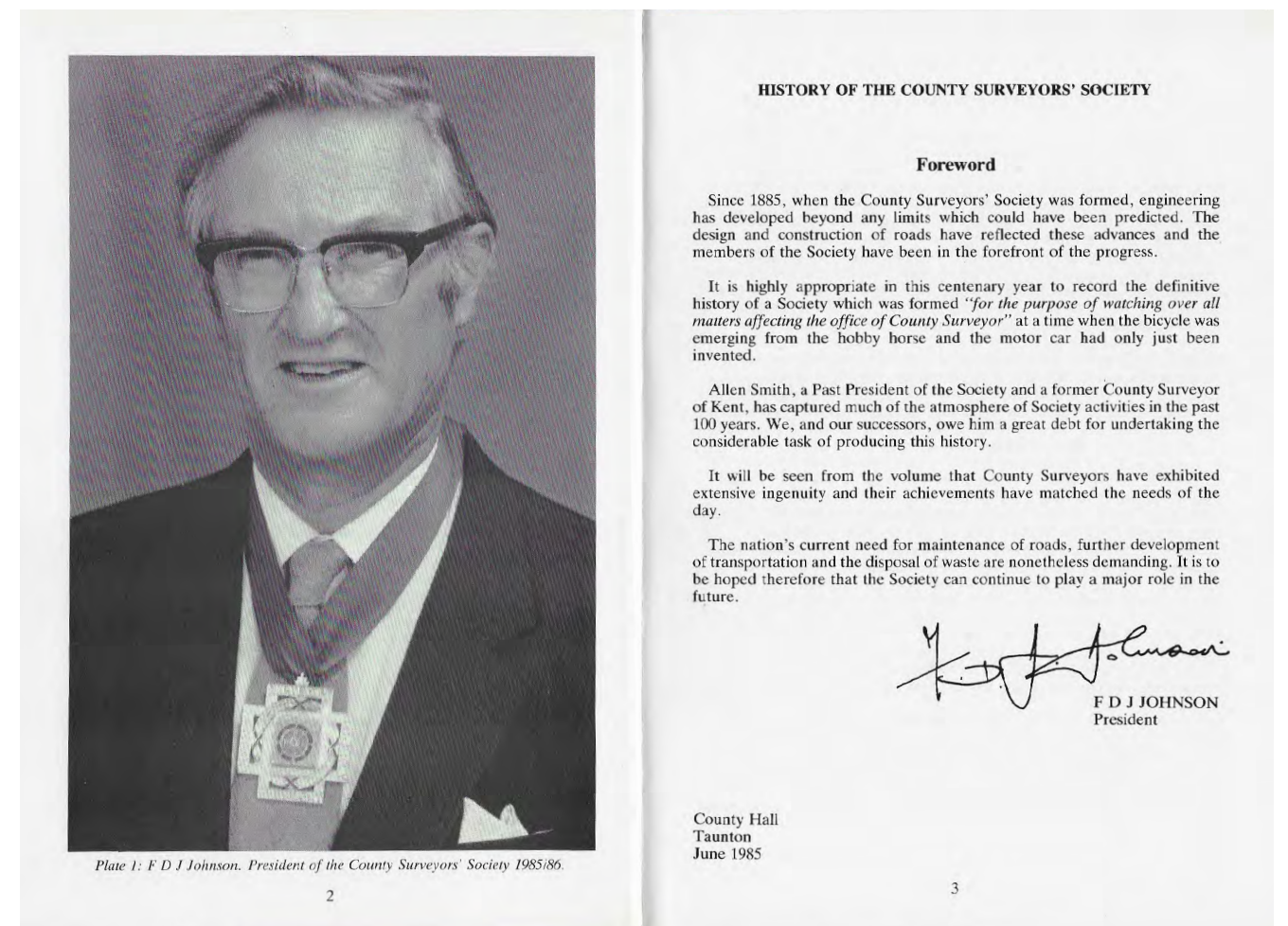


Plate 1: F D J Johnson. President of the County Surveyors' Society 1985/86.

Foreword from F D J Johnson, President of CSS 1985-86, taken from A History of the County Surveyors' Society, 1885 - 1985

John Ekins, President of CSS 1997-98



John Ekins

“ As ADEPT marks 140 years since the founding of the County Surveyors’ Society, I feel immensely proud to have played a small part in that long and distinguished history. ”

Former County Surveyor, Hampshire County Council.

Leading the CSS

I was President of the County Surveyors’ Society (CSS) during 1997- 98. That was a year of political change that brought a new Labour Government and a new Secretary of State, John Prescott, who was genuinely interested in transport. His arrival heralded a flurry of policy announcements, most notably the Integrated Transport White Paper, which shaped much of the national conversation that followed.

Back in Hampshire, where I served as County Surveyor, we were adjusting to political change of our own. After four years of a Labour/Lib Dem coalition, a Conservative administration returned, one that thankfully continued to support many of the existing policies, including the all-important retention of our in-house engineering consultancy.

Restructuring and challenges

We were still dealing with the aftermath of the Tory-inspired Local Government Review, which had led to the downsizing of Hampshire County Council to allow for the creation of Portsmouth and Southampton as unitary councils. There was a certain irony in the timing because while central government was promoting ‘integrated transport’, in Hampshire our transport authority was being disintegrated.

My work, and the nature of the organisation at that time, was firmly operational, being focused on highways, transportation and waste disposal. I also carried corporate management responsibilities for the wider environment grouping.

As a historical footnote that is a point of personal pride, I was only the sixth person to hold the office of County Surveyor in Hampshire since 1885, and by a mixture of luck, timing (and a bit of guile) I managed to serve my entire career within the county which was a great honour.

Projects and innovation

Hampshire was delivering a substantial capital programme at that time. In partnership with Surrey, we were completing the Blackwater Valley Road, linking Camberley to the Hog’s Back. We were preparing new Local Transport Plans, feeding into the latest iteration of the County Structure Plan, and we were promoting a light rapid transit scheme between Fareham and Portsmouth which included a proposed tunnel under Portsmouth Harbour.

On the waste side, we had just implemented a 30-year contract with Veolia, delivering three new waste incinerators with energy recovery, alongside a network of new recycling centres.

A slightly more challenging development was the transfer of all home-to-school transport functions to our department along with the responsibility for a large team of staff who escorted pupils with special needs to school each day.

We also managed to retain a foothold in motorway maintenance, successfully winning the Area 3 contract in partnership with Mott MacDonald. Internationally, Hampshire was active in promoting innovation in transport telematics and in European networking through conferences and programmes.

Leading CSS through transition

At CSS, our focus was on recovery and renewal after the Local Government Review. We worked hard to engage colleagues from the new unitary authorities and metropolitan districts. We also had to build bridges with the Technical Advisors Group (TAG), which represented technical directors in unitaries and districts, and at one point had lobbied to abolish county councils entirely.

Like ADEPT’s Autumn and Spring conferences, gathering together to share ideas and experiences were vital. The Provincial Meeting on the President’s patch and the Annual Dinner at the Royal Automobile Club attracted senior civil servants and ministers, and at my dinner as President, we were joined by Baroness Hayman, then Minister for Transport.

Reflections on change

In the late 1990s and early 2000s it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the relevance of the CSS in a rapidly changing world. We debated whether to change the name but decided that CSS had strong brand recognition that was worth preserving. With hindsight, we were probably wrong, and it proved to be a very good move when the Society later evolved into ADEPT.

As ADEPT marks 140 years since the founding of the County Surveyors’ Society, I feel immensely proud to have played a small part in that long and distinguished history. The organisation has always stood for professional excellence, integrity and collaboration, qualities that have allowed it to evolve and thrive through periods of immense change in local government and beyond.

Looking back, it’s remarkable to see how ADEPT has developed to reflect the shifting needs of place directors and the communities they serve. What began as a society of engineers focused on roads and bridges has become a diverse network of leaders shaping places, driving sustainability and responding to the complex challenges of today. Yet at its heart, the organisation remains true to its founding principles, using expertise, evidence and sound judgement to deliver real benefits for communities across the country. It’s a legacy to be proud of and one that continues to inspire confidence in the generations who follow.

Mike Moore, President of CSS 1998-99



Mike Moore

“ ADEPT’s leadership remains vital in reminding politicians that the health and wellbeing of ‘place’ directly shapes the lives and subsequently the votes of constituents. ”

Former County Surveyor and Director of Environmental Services, North Yorkshire County Council.

Defining ‘place’ through public service

When I became President of the County Surveyors’ Society in 1998, the term ‘place’ wasn’t yet part of our professional vocabulary, however the idea behind it certainly was.

In the context of public service, I think of ‘place’ as the location where services meet to serve the public need. It’s where highways, planning, environment, waste, transport and regeneration collide. Ideally these services amplify one another through common objectives and partnerships. Terms may change, but the drive and desire for successful, effective and strong communities is a constant.

A profession that connects disciplines

Throughout my career, I saw the gradual broadening of the county surveyor’s role into that which we would now define as environmental or place director. The technical engineering roots never disappeared, but the job became as much about collaboration and negotiation as design.

This transition mirrored society’s expectations as communities required more joined-up services. Councillors needed coherent advice that reflected economic, environmental and social outcomes combined. ADEPT (and CSS before it) provided the framework for that need, bringing experts together to share practice and experience and to influence policy at a national level.

For 140 years, in its evolving role, this collective knowledge has been a quiet but powerful industry force. Its impartial, professional advice, offered to Whitehall and Westminster remains as valuable now as it was then.

Challenges and realities

I feel enormous sympathy for my successors as decades of funding cuts have left much of our infrastructure fragile and vulnerable. Roads, bridges and drainage systems age faster than they can be repaired, and the public’s patience is understandably thin.

Too often, residents experience public service as a frustration rather than a support with council offices difficult to reach, projects delayed and communication patchy. For many, daily life has become an exercise in risk management rather than civic confidence.

That is why the stability ADEPT provides is so important. Its members represent professionalism amid turbulence, a commitment to place and to the communities they serve.

They are leaders who continue to argue for investment, resilience and long-term planning for the benefit of all.

Leadership that endures

Leading through uncertainty has always been part of our story. In my time, we faced reorganisation, new legislation and shifting political priorities. Today’s directors of place face these, as well as the complexities of digital transformation, climate change and a continuing squeeze on resources.

Despite this, the essential task is the same and that is to ensure that good infrastructure and effective services support every community and every individual.

ADEPT’s leadership remains vital in reminding politicians that the health and wellbeing of ‘place’ directly shapes the lives and subsequently the votes of constituents.

If there’s a lesson to take from my years in local government, it’s that professionalism and perseverance matter. Places succeed when those responsible for them stay focused on the public good, however the terminology evolves.

Bob Wilkins OBE, President of CSS 2003-04



Bob Wilkins OBE

Former Director of Transport and Environment, East Sussex County Council.

Place-Time: reflections on change and continuity

When I look back on my career, I'm struck by how recently the word 'place' has appeared in local government discussions. It wasn't a term we used when I began. Yet everything I worked on was, in truth, about place, its people, its politics, its history, its geography and its constant change.

For me, 'place' has always been dynamic. It isn't a fixed location on a map; it is shaped by time as much as by terrain. I think of it as Place-Time, a continuum where each generation experiences and reshapes its surroundings differently in response to the needs of the times.

I've spent over thirty years living in East Sussex, a county that in some ways is transformed and in others very familiar. But my understanding of place also draws on the time I spent in Warwickshire, the Isle of Wight and Hertfordshire. Each had its own identity and challenges, from motorways and manufacturing, mining and quarrying to coastal management, transport and economic challenges to managing growth pressures near the capital. Those contrasts taught me that place is always where, who and what matters at the time.

Learning from each other

One of the great strengths of the County Surveyors' Society (CSS), now ADEPT, has always been its willingness to evolve with the times. As one of my predecessors, Keith Madelin, reminded us, the organisation must always reflect the needs of its current members, not simply repeat what has gone before.

Each president and director brings a fresh perspective, but we all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. That sense of shared learning has been our greatest foundation. In earlier decades, the connection between local government and central government was often direct and it wasn't unusual for a Transport Minister to phone a county surveyor for advice. The channels and the fluidity of communication have changed, but the respect and expertise endure.

“ Being a director in local government is a privilege, because where there is clear political leadership and also partnerships between elected members and officers, we can provide stability and change in direction for essential services. ”

From motorways to waste, airport capacity to housing

Infrastructure and services have always defined the public's sense of place. Private entrepreneurs built the railways, but it was local leaders who created reservoirs, pipelines and, with the CSS, the first blueprint for the motorway network. Local government was at the heart of post-war progress. Lancashire built Britain's first motorway, councils developed airports from former airfields and successive generations have planned for housing, waste, schools and industry to reflect and respond to the changing needs and sizes of communities.

Over time, responsibilities have shifted between the public and private sectors, but ADEPT members have remained at the centre of delivery, helping communities grow, adapt and thrive.

Leadership and resilience

Being a director in local government is a privilege, because where there is clear political leadership and also partnerships between elected members and officers, we can provide stability and change in direction for essential services. Good leadership is about enabling others, giving officers the space, resources and encouragement to innovate and ensuring members have the evidence to make long-term, resilient decisions.

As President, I saw my role less as the author of change and more as an enabler of it, supporting the expertise and bright ideas and ensuring every voice could be heard. The president and his/her team may set goals, but it is the members who create the building blocks that make our organisation strong.

After 140 years, ADEPT's ability to evolve while holding on to its core principles of collaboration, professionalism and service to the public remains its greatest achievement. 'Place' will always change over time, and our responsibility is to help it do so wisely and well.

Geoff Allister OBE, President of CSS 2005-06



Geoff Allister OBE

Director of Engineering, Roads Service, Northern Ireland.

When I was President of the County Surveyors' Society (CSS) in 2005-06, I was Director of Engineering at Roads Service Northern Ireland (RSNI). My role covered engineering policy and standards, and I was also Head of the Engineering Profession, leading both our in-house consultancy and direct labour workforce.

RSNI was unique in the UK in that it acted as the sole road authority for all roads in Northern Ireland including motorways, trunk roads and local roads which covered around 26,000 kilometres of network. These were supported by an annual budget of approximately £450 million and a workforce of 2,100 people.

I represented RSNI on the UK Chief Engineers' Committee and the UK Roads Liaison Group and I worked closely with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland through the Cross Border Steering Group, which oversaw the joint development of the island's motorway network via public-private partnerships. I also sat on a working group of the Conference of European Directors of Roads (CEDR). These experiences meant I could bring a genuinely national and international perspective to the Society's work on highway and infrastructure issues.

Challenges and priorities as Vice President and President - 2004-06

The mid-2000s were a period of intense change and challenge across English local government. Yet another reorganisation was underway, with a move towards unitary authorities, while growing pressures on adult social care budgets were starting to bite into already stretched highways funding.

The introduction of the cabinet model of governance with executive leaders and portfolio holders was also reshaping relationships between elected members and professional heads of service. At the same time, major planning reforms were being proposed, creating further uncertainty for local authorities.

Within the Society, the retirement of John Ekins in 2003, the last member to hold the title of 'County Surveyor', prompted an important discussion about the continued relevance of the CSS name and brand.

Against this backdrop, my colleagues on the Presidential team and I worked hard to ensure the Society remained relevant to its members and stakeholders, what we might call 'raising the profile' in today's marketing terms.

We mounted a sustained campaign to influence government thinking on planning reform and developed guidance for local authorities on highway asset management. We also drew attention to the looming costs of waste management as well as to the worrying backlog in street lighting maintenance.

On many of these issues, we reported directly to central government and even gave evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee. Our efforts to demonstrate the Society's authority and relevance were paying off, something that was underlined in 2006 when Peter Hain, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a Cabinet Minister, accepted our invitation to speak at the Annual Dinner at the RAC Club. It was a memorable moment that showed how seriously CSS was being taken by national policy and decision-makers.

Climate change and the highways challenge

While significant progress has been made over the years in addressing climate change, there is still a long way to go to meet legislative and environmental targets. I often reflect on whether we've struck the right balance between building new infrastructure and maintaining and managing what we already have.

The potential of predictive highway maintenance remains an area of real opportunity because it offers substantial value for money, along with improved safety benefits for road users. However, I'm not sure we've fully realised its potential yet.

Another concern is the persistent tendency to cut research budgets when finances are tight. If we are serious about tackling the climate challenge, we must reverse that trend. Investment in research and innovation is crucial to helping the sector respond effectively and sustainably to the pressures of climate change. This is why programmes like Live Labs 2 are so valuable and have the potential for widespread positive impact across the sector.

Reflections on ADEPT's 140th anniversary

As ADEPT celebrates its 140th anniversary, I'm very proud to have been part of an organisation with such a rich and influential history. Throughout my career, I've seen first-hand how the CSS and later ADEPT, evolved to reflect the changing needs of local government, place directors and the communities we all serve.

From its roots as a society of engineers, ADEPT has grown into a dynamic network of place leaders with a board remit, shaping sustainable communities and influencing national policy. In my opinion, the organisation has remained grounded in professional expertise and collaboration, two ideas that will continue to serve us well in these changing times.

It is the combination of adaptability and integrity that has allowed ADEPT to thrive for 140 years and will, I am sure, continue to guide it well into the future.

“ From its roots as a society of engineers ADEPT has grown into a dynamic network of place leaders with a board remit, shaping sustainable communities and influencing national policy. ”

John Deegan, President of CSS 2005-06



John Deegan

“ Professionalism and expertise-based guidance for the public good, remain the watchwords of ADEPT, and its members continue to play a vital role in shaping national policy to address existing challenges and complex new problems. ”

Warwickshire County Council.

Reflections on my early career

I first became aware of the County Surveyors’ Society (CSS) in the early 1970s when I was a graduate working for Oxfordshire County Council. My background was in mathematics and transport studies rather than engineering, so I initially saw CSS as something of an elite body, led by the formidable County Surveyors who, at that time, dominated local government’s upper ranks.

The local government reorganisation of 1974 changed things. In Oxfordshire, transport and land use planning were brought together under the County Planning Department rather than Highways, a decision that caused a few ripples at the time but helped to underline the need for a more ‘joined-up’ approach. Over time, financial pressures and the drive for efficiency encouraged councils to bring together highways, planning and the environmental services, creating the early foundations of what we now think of as place making and place leadership.

Later on, as councils began to secure developer contributions to fund the roads and infrastructure needed to support new housing, I found myself increasingly involved in that process, firstly in Oxfordshire and later in Hertfordshire. My focus shifted toward making better use of public assets, selling surplus land and buildings to strengthen council finances, although this was often to the frustration of my former planning and engineering colleagues.

Reconnecting with CSS and the changing culture of the Society

When I joined Warwickshire County Council in 1994, I reconnected with CSS and the wider place making agenda. By then, the culture of the organisation had begun to evolve and although engineering remained central to its identity, there was a growing awareness that the Society had to adapt to stay relevant.

I felt welcomed rather than treated as an outsider, even though my background was not in engineering and the Society was becoming more inclusive and forward-looking. Environmental concerns were rising up the agenda and the importance of tackling climate change was becoming increasingly clear. We also recognised that the traditional, male-dominated culture that had characterised much of the profession needed to be urgently addressed.

As Chair of the Environment Committee in the late 1990s, I saw these changes at close quarters. The work of the Society was broadening, embracing not just the technical and operational aspects of highways and infrastructure but the wider responsibilities of local government in shaping sustainable communities. I became involved in politically charged issues such as the government’s proposal to remove counties from the planning process. We ultimately lost that battle, though perhaps more because of central government’s mishandling of legislation than our own influence.

In 2006, I was elected President of CSS and I believe I was the first person from a non-engineering background to hold that role. I am pleased that others from different disciplines followed soon after, reflecting how the Society was changing to match the evolving diversity of local government leadership.

Planning and place leadership

I have always regretted the loss of the counties’ role in strategic planning. In my view, that change has contributed directly to the chronic underperformance of housebuilding in this country. The fragmentation of the planning system and the rise of local opposition to development have made it far harder to plan effectively for growth.

Anyone who has witnessed a district council planning committee in action will understand the strength of the local resistance to development, the so-called ‘not in my backyard’ instinct. Until there is a return to a broader and more strategic approach to planning, what I used to call the ‘Mae West theory of local government’, that bigger can indeed be better, we will continue to struggle to deliver the housing and infrastructure the country needs.

Looking back on the work and impact of the CSS and ADEPT

The Society’s name was a matter of discussion for several years and while I was President, we were still debating whether to retain ‘County Surveyors’ Society’ or adopt something new. I think the eventual decision to become ADEPT was absolutely the right one. It reflected the evolution of the organisation while preserving its commitment to professional excellence and expertise.

Since retiring, I have not been as closely involved in the sector, but I know that ADEPT has continued to offer what made CSS so valuable, a space for open and constructive discussion among peers, a source of collective insight and support and an opportunity to share experiences and challenges in a spirit of mutual respect and good humour.

Celebrating 140 years of the CSS and ADEPT

As ADEPT celebrates its 140th anniversary, I would like to say how proud I am to have been even a small part of that long and distinguished journey. Over the years, the organisation has grown, reflecting the changing priorities of the communities we work to support.

Professionalism and expertise-based guidance for the public good, remain the watchwords of ADEPT, and its members continue to play a vital role in shaping national policy to address existing challenges and complex new problems.

Richard Wills, President of CSS 2007-08



Richard Wills

Former Director of Environment & Economy, Lincolnshire County Council.

What place meant when I was President and why does place still matter now?

I was 18 when I joined Cornwall County Council (1974) as a trainee civil engineer. This was the conventional route for becoming a County Surveyor, civil engineering “being the art of directing the great sources of power in Nature for the use and convenience of man” - a wonderful quote by engineer and author Thomas Tedgold.

Although professionally rooted in ‘place’, I never attached that word to my job title because it felt too nebulous. Shortly after my appointment as director, I met a councillor in his ‘patch’ and I explained why something he wanted was too complex from an engineering perspective to be affordable. His response? “That was the best explanation I’ve had for ages... the last director just spouted policy.” I’m proud to say that he always listened to my policy advice after that!

For most of history, ‘place’ has been the only means of developing communities. Indeed, unless there is a major redesign of the human body, our interaction with our physical world will always be place-based.

What is place, really?

As my career developed, it became clear that apart from the physical reshaping of landscapes, there was growing evidence that our interactions with the natural and built environments had profound effects on the health, wealth and well-being of our communities and the individuals within them.

Of course, people shape place, but place also shapes people. Physical geography constrains and enables the way we live our lives and if you look at the map of historical counties and cities, you can see how physical geography, especially hills, rivers and the sea, defined boundaries that were cultural, social and political.

Information technology and the explosion of social media may have caused new generations to view ‘community’ in a different light - that being, communities of interest, perhaps meeting not in a physical place but in a ‘virtual world’. Ultimately, though, we exist in tangible time and space: learning, playing, working, socialising and ultimately dying and that won’t really change.

“As a professional body, we need to be at the forefront of practice and knowledge, because only then can we continue to be of value to our society by playing our part in our democratic system of government.”

Place directors - helping to ‘build’ the foundations

In the first half of my career, I built foundations in the physical and literal sense. Roads, bridges, buildings, landfill sites, waste disposal facilities and flood and coastal protection schemes all came under my jurisdiction. At one point in my career, I also had emergency planning and the fire service as part of my portfolio of responsibilities. Now chief officers in local government have more holistic remits that encompass everything from planning, environmental protection, economic development and many community services.

Traditionally, county surveyors had been professional leaders in a relatively narrow part of the council remit. My job was to embed values and a sense of purpose and secure a working environment with resources that allowed others to bring their specific expertise to solving problems in multi-disciplinary teams.

Directors of place now lead across boundaries because they are connectors, ensuring that democratic decisions are implemented effectively and that professional expertise informs political judgement.

The guiding mission, to make physical infrastructure work for society has not changed, but its complexity has grown.

The evolution of infrastructure, services and our modern idea of place

In providing public infrastructure, our focus tends to be on society as a whole, rather than particular individuals that our colleagues in social care or education address more specifically.

For this reason, we often find ourselves developing propositions that must balance overall benefits for society with potential disadvantages for a few individuals. A major infrastructure scheme may have huge economic and environmental benefits, but the homes of some people may have to be demolished in the process. Professionals in place leadership must build effective working relationships with politicians whose democratic mandate, requires them to make judgements on behalf of the communities we serve.

In an increasingly polarised world, we must develop places in ways that facilitate community coherence. This means that public participation in the processes of decision taking must be authentic. It means good design and high standards of maintenance and it means providing joyful spaces that are fit for purpose and encourage a genuine sense of belonging.

ADEPT - leading through change, leadership and resilience

I was President at an interesting time, perhaps one of the last ‘county surveyors’, though I never held that title as it was already considered archaic. I was deeply proud to be a chartered engineer, but I could see a future where professionals from many different disciplines would contribute to the outcomes that I sought.

We need to place even more emphasis on maintaining what we have and becoming more sustainable. The solutions and approaches that worked 40 years ago are not right for our climate-affected and overpopulated world now.

Strong leadership has been a constant throughout the 140 years of the CSS and ADEPT’s existence. As a professional body, we need to be at the forefront of practice and knowledge, because only then can we continue to be of value to our society by playing our part in our democratic system of government.

I hope we continue to build on the wisdom of those who came before us.

What does place mean?



“Place represents a sense of belonging and identity.”

Angela Jones, President of ADEPT.



“Place is much more than geography - it's about identity, community and opportunity.”

Nigel Riglar, Past President of ADEPT (2020-21).



“Place means different things to different people, but at its core, it’s about the things that enable people to put their best foot forward.”

Rupert Clubb, Past President of ADEPT (2016-17).



“Place is the cohesive, functioning, vibrant and resilient communities we work hard to create and support with the delivery of our place based services.”

Ann Carruthers, Past President of ADEPT (2024-25).



“Place means to me ‘communities and all the services that communities collectively need to function well’.”

Paula Hewitt, Past President of ADEPT (2021-22).



“Place is about liveability: it’s about making locations as vibrant, as safe and as inclusive as they can be.”

Anthony Payne, Past President of ADEPT (2023-24).



“Place represents a sense of belonging and identity.”

Andy Gutherson, 2nd Vice President of ADEPT.



“Place is like writing the score and conducting the orchestra: about bringing many moving parts together - people, services, communities, partners and environments.”

Neil Gibson, Past President of ADEPT (2018-19).



“I’ve always thought of ‘place’ as something tangible, the things people can touch and feel every day.”

Darryl Eyers, Past President of ADEPT (2019-20).



“Place is about balance, the right ingredients and ownership. Optimise those and communities will have a happy, healthy and economically strong place.”

Mark Kemp, Past President of ADEPT (2022-23).



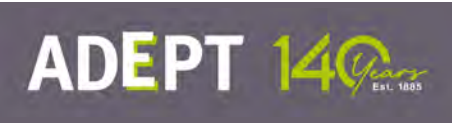
“Place leadership is people leadership.”

Andrew Cook, 1st Vice President of ADEPT.



“The importance of place is in its power to connect people.”

Katie Stewart, 2nd Vice President of ADEPT.



Timeline of ADEPT / CSS Presidents

Year	Name	County / Local Authority
1980-81	Gerry Leech	North Yorkshire County Council
1985-86	Fred Johnson	Somerset County Council
1986-87	Vivian Knight	Cheshire County Council
1987-88	Michael Hawkins OBE	Devon County Council
1988-89	Mike Cottell OBE	Kent County Council
1989-90	Brian Mansell OBE	Cornwall County Council
1990-91	Vivian Jones OBE	Hereford & Worcester County Council
1991-92	Brian Oldridge OBE	Cambridge County Council
1992-93	Mike Selfe OBE	Essex County Council
1993-94	Keith Madelin	Shropshire County Council
1994-95	Mike Kendrick OBE	Northamptonshire County Council
1995-96	Tommy Thompson OBE	Leicestershire County Council
1996-97	David Hutchinson	Dorset County Council
1997-98	John Ekins	Hampshire County Council
1998-99	Mike Moore OBE	North Yorkshire County Council
1999-2000	Graham Harding	Lancashire County Council
2000-01	Ed Chorlton OBE	Devon County Council
2001-02	Richard Wigginton	Worcestershire County Council
2002-03	David Harvey	Derbyshire County Council
2003-04	Bob Wilkins OBE	East Sussex County Council
2004-05	Alastair Jefford	Kent County Council
2005-06	Geoff Allister OBE	Northern Ireland Roads Service
2006-07	John Deegan	Warwickshire County Council
2007-08	Richard Wills	Lincolnshire County Council
2008-09	Brian Smith	Cambridgeshire County Council
2009-10	Alison Quant OBE	Hampshire County Council

Year	Name	County / Local Authority
2010-11	George Batten	Wiltshire County Council
2011-12	Matthew Lugg OBE	Leicestershire County Council
2012-13	Miles Butler	Dorset County Council
2013-14	Steve Kent	Cheshire West & Chester Council
2014-15	David Bishop	Nottingham City Council
2015-16	Heather Barnes	Devon County Council
2016-17	Rupert Clubb	East Sussex County Council
2017-18	Simon Neilson	Walsall Council
2018-19	Neil Gibson	Buckinghamshire County Council
2019-20	Darryl Eyers	Staffordshire County Council
2020-21	Nigel Riglar	South Gloucestershire Council
2021-22	Paula Hewitt	Somerset County Council
2022-23	Mark Kemp	Hertfordshire County Council
2023-24	Anthony Payne	Plymouth City Council
2024-25	Ann Carruthers	Leicestershire County Council
2025-26	Angela Jones	Westmorland & Furness Council



Did you know? ADEPT members:

- Serve **80% of households** in England - that's **42+ million** people.
- Handle **75% of all recycled waste** in England.
- Collect **16 million** tonnes of waste a year.
- Recycle or compost **7 million** tonnes of waste a year.
- Manage **164,000 miles** of road.
- Invest **£3.87 billion** a year on highways and transport services.



ADEPT 140 Years

Est. 1885

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of local authority place directors and their teams. Our members manage vital local services - from highways, waste, recycling and planning - while also preparing for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

ADEPT is a membership based, voluntary organisation with members across England. We bring together directors from county, unitary, metropolitan and combined authorities, along with sub-national transport bodies and corporate partners. Collectively, our members provide services for more than 42 million people, manage 164,000 miles of road and handle around 75% of all recycled waste in England.

ADEPT members develop long term strategies, investment and infrastructure needed to make their places resilient, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous. They drive clean, sustainable growth, delivering the projects that are fundamental to creating more resilient communities, economies and infrastructure. These services include housing, environmental and regulatory services, planning, economic development, culture and highways and transport.

We develop, support and represent members to make their places more resilient, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous, leading the transformation of local authorities. We proactively engage with central government on emerging issues, promoting initiatives aimed at influencing policy, regulation and funding, developing best practices and by responding to government initiatives and consultations. We also drive leadership development, foster innovation through programmes and initiatives.

For more information on ADEPT please visit the website: www.adeptnet.org.uk