


ADEPT

Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

Quarterly Environment Board meeting

21 April 2026

	<p>Attendees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolyn McKenzie – Chair (Part) • Steve Palfrey – Chair (Part) • Simon Adams • Daire Casey • David Dale • Tim De-Keyzer • Ellen Fineran • Wayne Lewis • Sarah Gilbert • Doug Hill • Dan Janota • Kristi Nicholls – note taker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ralph Kemp • Olawale Ladapo • Kate Langdown • Mark Minkley • James Potter • Kylie Russell • Nada Saidi • Elliot Tinton • Lynn Trigwell • Sarah Valdus 	<p>Action Owner</p>
	<p>Welcome and Introductions Carolyn McKenzie welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>		
	<p>Land Use Framework – Nada Saidi, Defra The Board received an update from Nada Saidi on the recently published, non-statutory cross-government Land Use Framework, which sets out a long-term vision for land use in England to 2050 following consultation in 2025. The framework aims to address increasing pressures on land by providing a shared spatial context and common language to support more coherent, strategic decision-making across housing, infrastructure, food production, climate adaptation and nature recovery, reducing siloed approaches and policy ambiguity. It establishes guiding principles—right reason, right place, multifunctionality, future-ready decisions and adaptive management—intended to inform, rather than determine, planning decisions, without removing local discretion or introducing national zoning. The framework will influence national spatial planning policy over time, including the forthcoming refresh of the National Planning Policy Framework, with work underway alongside MHCLG colleagues, and is expected to strengthen national signals, improve alignment across strategies, enhance spatial evidence and data access, and support the role of spatial development strategies in balancing priorities at the appropriate scale. The item was positioned as a discussion, with members invited to provide feedback on how the framework could best support plan-making and decision-making in practice and what success would look like in five years’ time; no formal decisions were taken, but ongoing engagement and two-way dialogue with practitioners were agreed.</p> <p>The Board discussed how the national Land Use Framework is intended to support, rather than duplicate, the development of statutory Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) prepared by upper-tier and strategic authorities. Carolyn McKenzie highlighted the need for clarity on whether authorities would need to produce a local version of a land use framework alongside existing plans, such as SDSs, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Local Area Energy Plans, in order to provide a coherent evidence base for making strategic trade-offs, particularly on infrastructure and environmental priorities. In response, Nada Saidi confirmed that SDS’s are viewed as the critical spatial scale at which national objectives are interpreted and balanced and that the Land Use Framework is not intended to create an additional plan or require duplication. Instead, it is expected that specialist strategies (for example, Local Nature Recovery Strategies) would feed into SDS’s with the Framework providing overarching principles and potentially, nationally modelled spatial evidence to help strategic authorities understand implications for their areas.</p> <p>Nada emphasised that this approach is still work in progress with active collaboration underway through existing pathfinder programmes and proposed pilots to test integration in practice and ensure that any data released is useful.</p> <p>ACTION: It was agreed to link Defra into forthcoming 6 x pilot areas and would share details of these pilots to support future collaboration. Members also confirmed strong interest in the Defra Place-Based Pathfinder Programme.</p> <p>David Dale stressed the importance of sustained engagement between Defra and the local government sector to understand how the Land Use Framework is being interpreted and applied in practice,</p>		

	<p>including emerging challenges and lessons from local implementation. It was noted that Defra's approach to ongoing stakeholder engagement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies, through regular forums involving local government and wider sectors has been effective in addressing practical delivery issues following the introduction of statutory duties.</p> <p>ACTION: David Dale suggested a similar, structured engagement mechanism for the Land Use Framework, despite its non-statutory status, would be highly beneficial. It was agreed that Defra should consider establishing an ongoing stakeholder engagement group for the Land Use Framework to support continuous feedback, shared learning and effective use across local authorities.</p> <p>Dan Janota from Natural England outlined the strategic direction of Natural England's work on development plans with a particular focus on strengthening early engagement in plan-making and equipping the workforce to provide more integrated, joined-up advice to local authorities that reflects tools such as the Land Use Framework and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Dan highlighted the need for clarity on Natural England's organisational offer and expectations in relation to Spatial Development Strategies, and invited views on where Natural England can add the greatest value, particularly through early engagement and improved data integration. Carolyn McKenzie emphasized critical importance of early and coordinated engagement through forthcoming pilot work involving arm's-length bodies and noted that greater strategic visibility of future Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) is needed so they can be mapped early and understood within the wider local and regional spatial picture.</p> <p>ACTION: Dan Janota & Nada Saidi to arrange further conversations to align workforce planning, engagement approaches and strategic integration across plans and strategies.</p> <p>Tim De-Keyzer from Suffolk County Council also Chair of Natural Capital & Heritage Group for ADEPT raised questions about how Defra intends to apply the Land Use Framework principles in practice across farming, food and agricultural policy noting that current references within the framework suggest alignment with the National Food Strategy and the forthcoming Farming Roadmap but lack clarity on delivery mechanisms, incentives and timescales. While welcoming the overall direction and the concept of these three pillars working together, Tim highlighted ambiguity around how the framework will shape future farming support and land management incentives and is a critical gap given the wide range of stakeholders involved beyond local authorities. Tim emphasised that greater transparency and detail would be valuable to support understanding, coordination and effective engagement at national and local levels.</p> <p>ACTION: Tim De-Keyzer would welcome further discussion with Defra colleagues on the interaction between the Land Use Framework, farming policy and food strategy and that this should be explored through continued engagement.</p> <p>Daire Casey noted that while the framework sets out high-level national aspirations for land use change (eg relating to climate mitigation, renewable energy and nature) there is limited visibility of regional-level analysis that would help strategic authorities interpret what the principles mean in practice for their areas. Carolyn McKenzie reinforced the importance of this perspective, highlighting that SDS's operate at mayoral combined authority level but are underpinned by a statutory duty to co-operate across neighbouring areas making a wider regional or sub-regional view essential, particularly where issues such as nature, water and energy systems interact across boundaries.</p> <p>The discussion highlighted a shared interest in clearer regional evidence or spatial analysis to support consistent, joined-up planning and cross-boundary decision-making and members invited Defra to reflect on how the framework could better support this need.</p> <p>The Board discussed the application of the Land Use Framework beyond the national level, noting a gap between national objectives and locally produced Spatial Development Strategies. Nada (Defra) confirmed that no formal regional analysis has been undertaken, as SDSs and Local Nature Recovery Strategies remain the primary mechanisms at that scale, although national modelling may be disaggregated for context.</p> <p>Daire Casey emphasised the need for clearer links between the framework and economic growth, particularly to support strategic trade-offs and cross-boundary planning. Nada (Defra) confirmed that the framework's principles are intended to apply at all scales, encouraging early integration of strategies, clearer trade-offs and co-location of development and nature where possible.</p>	<p>Dan Janota & Nada Saidi</p>
	<p>Strategic Water Resources Framework Programme – Elliot Tinton, Environment Agency</p> <p>Elliot Tinton outlined his role at the Environment Agency, leading the team responsible for regulatory input into major new water resource supply infrastructure, including reservoirs, large-scale water transfers, water recycling and desalination schemes.</p>  <p>ADEPT slides - SRO Programme April 26.</p> <p>The Board discussed the interrelationship between water resource planning and water quality, particularly in the South East and Water Resources East regions. Elliot Tinton explained that while water quality often receives greater attention due to visible impacts, long-term water resource resilience is equally critical, and both must be considered together. Elliot highlighted opportunities for major supply infrastructure schemes to deliver water quality benefits, alongside risks that large-scale transfers could shift or create water quality problems elsewhere. Trade-offs may need to be explored in future between water quality objectives and supply resilience, supported by strengthened standards (including in relation to PFAS) and increased requirements on water companies. Members observed that national-level planning frameworks do not yet fully model water quality and agreed there is a need to view water more explicitly as an</p>	

	<p>integrated system, encompassing supply, quality and nature recovery. Tim De-Keyzer said it's challenging for local authorities to understand how major water resource interventions link coherently across the wider regulatory regime, including demand management, wastewater control and industry regulation. Tim De-Keyzer highlighted that large-scale water infrastructure schemes, while necessary to secure long-term resilience, will have significant impacts on places and communities, creating delivery challenges comparable to those seen in the energy transition. He emphasised the need for a more coordinated, joined-up approach across regulators, government and industry, alongside clearer engagement with affected communities, to manage short-term impacts and build support for the long-term public benefits of these schemes.</p> <p>ACTION: Elliot Tinton acknowledged stronger, shared narrative is needed to explain the rationale, Elliot trade-offs and long-term benefits of these schemes, particularly for communities affected by their impacts Tinton and agreed would take away for further consideration.</p> <p>Daire Casey asked for greater clarity on specific roles local government is expected to play in delivering integrated water management in the short and long term (including scaling up activity). Daire Casey highlighted the value of learning from the energy sector, particularly local area energy planning and digitalisation work and requested reassurance that lessons are being shared between water and energy infrastructure providers. Elliot Tinton responded that the EA were more focused on addressing immediate regulatory challenges and scaling up delivery of a large national programme of water infrastructure but recognised the need to look further ahead and agreed to take these points away as well as energy planning, while being clear that no concrete proposals are available at this stage.</p> <p>ACTION: Suggested that a dedicated future session would be helpful to explore developments in the water sector, opportunities for alignment and how local authorities can engage more effectively with both sectors. ADEPT is planning to have a webinar on the role of local authorities in managing water resources, date to be confirmed but likely to be late June/early July. Carolyn has shared a draft brief with Defra.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Partner updates</p> <p>Defra – Ola Ladapo The recent biodiversity net gain (BNG) policy package launched last week, comprising published government responses to consultations on the application of BNG to nationally significant infrastructure projects and small developers alongside a new consultation on residential brownfield development and associated fee arrangements. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/biodiversity-net-gain-considering-a-targeted-exemption-for-brownfield-residential-development</p> <p>NSIPs Consultation responses - Biodiversity net gain for nationally significant infrastructure projects - GOV.UK</p> <p>BNG consultation responses on supporting smaller developers. Biodiversity net gain: considering a targeted exemption for brownfield residential development - GOV.UK</p> <p>Confirmation of senior-level engagement with Defra is being re-established, with an introductory meeting scheduled for 1 May between Carolyn McKenzie & Hannah Bartram and Defra Director, Edward Barker. ACTION: If you wish to submit any key points for discussion in advance of this introductory meeting with Edward Barker (Defra) please forward them to David Dale who will compile suggested agenda items.</p> <p>Environment Agency – Simon Adams The publication on 31 March of the Chief Scientist's Annual Review, authored by Dr Robert Bradbourne, which sets out how the EA is modernising its spatial planning advice to be more predictable, transparent and evidence-led and demonstrates how science underpins sustainable growth; a link to the public report will be shared. Chief Scientist's annual review 2025</p> <p>Progress under the Integrated Water Management Programme led by the Oxford–Cambridge (OxCam) team including the launch of a Planning and Water Toolkit to support early consideration of water issues in planning decisions and an Integrated Water Management Hub to share learning and guidance more widely. Planning and Water Toolkit Local Nature Recovery Strategies: Improving our waters</p> <p>Simon reported that 36 LNRs had now been published and it was noted that the Stakeholder Engagement Group is to meet on 23 April.</p> <p>Natural England – Dan Janota Work underway to implement forthcoming amendments to the NERC Act, noting that further detail on practical implications is expected to be shared soon. Dan highlighted ongoing work on workforce strategy, aimed at shifting capacity from reactive planning application casework towards earlier, more proactive engagement in strategic and spatial planning including Spatial Development Strategies, supported by targeted upskilling. A new three-year contract with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is being established to support this work.</p>	All Board
	<p>Working Group updates</p> <p>Energy & Clean Growth – Daire Casey A government call for evidence on the Warm Homes Fund, including views on eligible buildings and use</p>	

	<p>of grants versus loans. A forthcoming consultation on permitted development rights for small onshore wind turbines was highlighted, presenting potential opportunities for local authority-led schemes. Update on ADEPT's energy systems training, being developed for senior place and service leaders to strengthen strategic energy leadership and investment planning. Emerging Local Power Plans from the Government with emphasis on community energy and creating local partnerships. The group will hold a virtual Team call on 7th May at 13:30 to do a deep dive – all welcome to join.</p> <p>Flood & Water Management – Doug Hill Positive engagement with Environment Agency regarding refresh of the National Flood Risk Management Strategy. Doug Hill been invited to join the steering group with a small working group focusing on surface water and groundwater flooding. New flood funding regime with Environment Agency guidance aimed at simplifying business case development for local authorities. ACTION: Doug Hill & Kylie Russell to discuss around Environment Agency Innovation programme strategy around surface water & groundwater and how ADEPT can support it.</p> <p>Natural Capital & Heritage – Tim De-Keyzer The government released responses to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) consultation, including the introduction of a 0.2 hectare exemption for minor and medium sites, removing around half of residential developments from the BNG regime and a further live consultation on brownfield sites including proposed size thresholds and clearer definitions.</p> <p>BNG application to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPS) has been deferred to November. With changes to baseline calculations likely to prompt further discussion at project level. Ongoing consultation around brownfield land and how to define it better? ACTION: Tim De-Keyzer to speak to David Dale about whether ADEPT wants to respond.</p> <p>The Fingleton Review issued recently including proposed legislative changes to limit use of strengthened landscape duties in nationally significant infrastructure cases. ACTION: A new call for evidence on the role of the private sector in nature recovery, which members were encouraged to consider engaging with. Expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery: call for evidence - GOV.UK</p> <p>Waste – Steve Palfrey Upcoming meeting covering the LGR waste toolkit, the newly published Waste Crime Action Plan, and an update from PAC UK. The Circular Economy Growth Strategy (the revised waste strategy) remains awaited, pending ministerial sign-off.</p>	<p>Doug Hill & Kylie Russell</p> <p>David Dale/Tim De-Keyzer</p> <p>All</p>
	<p>ADEPT Business – Kylie Russell Transport / Infrastructure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We are working with Local Partnerships to develop a LGR highways toolkit. The purpose of the toolkit will be to provide a collection of resources (processes, templates, checklists etc) to support council officers navigating transport and highways aggregation / disaggregation of services due to LGR. The toolkit will be loosely based on the Local Partnerships waste LGR toolkit LGR Waste Toolkit - Local Partnerships. It will be launched at the ADEPT Spring Conference (13th May); we will also co-host an introductory webinar on 4th June. To register, see here. 2. ADEPT has responded to the latest government pothole announcement (here). "We are encouraged that red-rated councils will receive expert support. However, transparency and performance frameworks must be fair, clearly understood and allow local authorities to demonstrate the real complexity of maintaining their networks. We look forward to engaging with government on the detail of these new requirements". Our full statement is here. 3. We welcomed the opening of the Structures Fund (here). James Bailey, Chair of ADEPT's Engineering Board said: "The scale of the challenge should not be underestimated. The maintenance backlog across England's local authority bridges is significant and runs far in excess of the £1 billion available through this fund. The Structures Fund is an important and welcome step, but it is the beginning of addressing a backlog that has built up over many years." Our full statement is here. <p>Devolution / Growth / Planning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. We have submitted a response to the government's consultation on Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Other Changes to the Planning System. Angela Jones, President of ADEPT said: "ADEPT welcomes the government's ambition to modernise the planning system and supports the clearer structure proposed in the draft NPPF. It is vital that locally led planning is maintained, ensuring national policy provides a strong and consistent framework, while still allowing local authorities the flexibility to respond to the needs, opportunities and constraints of their places. The response is here." 5. The ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group have responded to the current call for evidence on reforming planning rules for digital infrastructure (here). 6. We responded to the consultation on Reducing the prevalence of private estate management 	

arrangements. The response is [here](#).

Environment / Climate

7. In the most recent climate change [blog](#), Nigel Riglar, Chair of the ADEPT Climate Change Board and Executive Director for Place, South Gloucestershire Council highlights the importance of the new guide developed by ADEPT and Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission ([An Introduction to Talking Climate](#)) to help local authority climate communicators.
8. We hosted a joint webinar with Natural England on 10th March to launch the new EXPLORE framework. EXPLORE is a set of resources designed to support local and combined authorities with integrated, place-based, strategic planning. It focuses on four apex targets, which are above those held by individual council departments, to support integration. These are health, well-being, nature, and sustainability. This bridges the gap between technical information and practical solutions. To find out more, see [here](#).
9. The Rapid Adaptation Pathways Assessment ([RAPA](#)) Toolkit, developed by ADEPT in partnership with the Environment Agency, has now been incorporated into the Met Office's updated Local Authority Climate Service ([LACS](#)) and is also available via the [MACC Hub](#). This is a significant milestone for the toolkit, making it more accessible than ever to local authorities planning for climate change impacts across the UK.

Events/Other

10. Following a workshop on 'navigating political change' with Professor Fred Paxton, we are drafting a briefing note for all place directors which will be circulated in advance of the 7th May local elections. If you would like to see this, please contact [Hannah Bartram](#).
11. We are celebrating ADEPT's 140th anniversary year by showcasing the voices of past, present and future Presidents, reflecting on the evolution of place leadership and exploring the challenges, innovations and aspirations shaping the future of the sector. We are publishing one essay a month over the anniversary year. Next in the series is Ann Carruthers, Immediate Past President of ADEPT and Director of Environment and Transport at Leicestershire County Council, who explores the topic "from potholes to smart roads: local highways and the future of infrastructure" (see [here](#)).
12. Dates for your diary – for more detail please visit the Events page on the website ([here](#)):
 - The Spring Conference and Annual Awards Dinner will be held in London on Wednesday 13th May. Transport Minister Simon Lightwood is confirmed as the headline speaker – to see the full programme and to register, see [here](#).
 - ADEPT is collaborating with Local Partnerships in a session at UKREiiF; in particular, a 'glassbox' round table from 1030-12pm on Weds 20th May. The focus of the round table is: *How to accelerate council social and affordable housing delivery and build a deliverable pipeline*.
 - The launch webinar for the LGR Highways Toolkit will take place 4th June – to register see [here](#).

AOB

David Dale noted the need to review the meeting dates and times to ensure they remain convenient. There was discussion on holding an in person meeting in July. Wider consultation will be undertaken before confirmation.

Next meeting is Wednesday 20th May at 11:00 – 12:00