**ADEPT Environment Board update September 2018**

It has been a busy summer for the Environment Board, with a meeting in July and then two Government consultations to respond to. The meeting on 17th July was well attended with representatives from 10 councils plus ADEPT President Neil Gibson and colleagues from DEFRA, BEIS, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

Rebecca Dangerfield, Head of Local Air Quality at DEFRA, delivered a presentation on the draft Clean Air Strategy, one of the key components on the 25-year Environment Plan launched by the PM in January. There was a lively discussion, and a firm view expressed that Government needs to provide a ‘joined up’ approach to air quality so that key investment and infrastructure decisions taken by the big spending departments – Transport, Housing, Defence – take account of the need to reduce air pollution. Other issues included:

* Air quality must be taken into account not just in infrastructure but also in the delivery of services – the post-Brexit procurement regime must allow and encourage local authorities and other public bodies to require contractors to use low emissions plant and vehicles
* Local strategies must focus on the ‘hot spots’ where NO2 exceedances are greatest and where transport emissions need to be reduced most
* Place Directors and planners will work with Public Health to create environments that promote active travel and public transport to generate air quality and health benefits
* If local authorities are to be expected to play a greater role in tackling air pollution it is important that they are given the powers and funding to do so; any new duties need additional resources to cover the full cost (the LGA has majored on this point in its response)
* In two-tier areas, there is a strong case for giving county councils (as transport and public health authorities) the lead role and a duty to co-ordinate the actions of other agencies, as with the Lead Local Flood Authority role established in 2010.

These and other points were reflected in the consultation response subsequently submitted jointly with the Transport Board (available on the ADEPT website).

The second speaker on air quality was Claire Haigh, Chief Executive of Greener Journeys, who spoke as the newly-appointed Chair of the Delivery Impacts Review Panel that is assessing the business plans and options appraisals submitted by councils and will advise the DEFRA/DfT Joint Air Quality Unit. The DIRP consists of nine members, mainly academics, and includes an ADEPT representative (Philip Williams from Gloucestershire). They are now assessing the first wave of plans submitted by Birmingham, Southampton, Derby, Nottingham and Leeds, with more to follow in the autumn.

Sam Kennedy from BEIS briefed the Board on plans for the first Green GB week in the autumn (a commitment in the [Clean Growth Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy)). He encouraged councils to take part in the week of events and media activity designed to promote the opportunities that come from Clean Growth and encourage businesses and the public to understand the role they can take to tackle climate change. Sam also gave an update on the BEIS Local Energy Programme and Local Energy Hubs designed to support local areas in identifying energy opportunities and delivering a pipeline of low carbon projects. LEPs have been asked to develop local energy strategies, which will highlight energy opportunities and challenges over the next 10-15 years, to tie in with thinking about Local Industrial Strategies. Five new Local Energy Hubs are being set up across England to identify and prioritise local energy projects for support. There was a robust discussion about how to better engage councils and ADEPT in the Local Energy Programme.

The afternoon workshop covered various aspects of the delivery of the 25-year Environment Plan. Jonathan Taylor of DEFRA described the Government’s consultation on environmental principles and governance following Brexit, with new legislation planned to establish an independent ‘watchdog’. Discussion points included:

* The role of the new environment body and its links to other enforcement bodies
* The likely size, powers, and resources of the new body
* How to embed the independence, sanctions, and strength of the new body
* Environmental principles are key
* How to ensure that environmental standards are properly reflected in the strategies and decisions of other Government departments? E.g. air quality concerns taken into account re infrastructure and housing growth

These and other points were reflected in the consultation response we submitted in August (available on the ADEPT website), and the Board is keen to engage further on specific issues once the draft Bill is published.

Adam Stewart of DEFRA gave a helpful update on local delivery issues, the review of designated landscapes (National Parks and AONBs), the nature recovery network, and the developing Resources and Waste Strategy.

Clare Warburton of Natural England presented ongoing work on Biodiversity Net Gain and Ecometrics. Comments in discussion included the impact on the viability of developments, practical considerations (labour intensive, hard to get ready to go), and lack of consistency in applying the principles across major infrastructure schemes. Jane Houghton of Natural England presented on their work on green infrastructure standards. The aim is to have a draft framework of GI standards by the end of 2018, to pilot in 2019. NE will hold workshops at each of the four stages of the project and will let ADEPT have details.