**Natural Capital & Heritage Working Group Update – January 2018**

**Position at the previous Board Meeting in October 2017**

Natural Capital and Heritage has been long acknowledged as one of the Environment Board’s priority workstreams, with a Position Statement first adopted in 2016. Given ongoing delays in the establishment of a dedicated Working Group, the Board asked Peter Chamberlain and David Dale to arrange an initial teleconference with key contacts to set the ball rolling.

**Progress Since October 2017**

* An initial teleconference was held on 18 October involving six individuals. Agreement was reached on the general approach to the composition and operation of the Working Group, with the current version of the Position Statement accepted as providing an appropriate context for this.
* An item in the ADEPT October newsletter resulted in the Group being extended to nine members, seven of these from upper tier authorities (with a southern / western bias at present), plus two Defra representatives.
* A meeting of the extended Group was held on 15 December at the Defra office (Nobel House) in London.
* The day before, two members of the Group attended (and provided ADEPT representation at) an ONS/Defra Natural Capital Conference, hosted by Therese Coffey, which focused on approaches to Natural Capital Accounting.

**Role and Priorities for the Working Group**

The following have been suggested as the main roles for this Working Group:

1. Establish links and collaborative working arrangements with other bodies and networks on areas of common interest.
2. Retain oversight of natural capital and heritage issues and promote awareness of and a high profile for these within (and beyond) ADEPT and its constituent authorities.
3. Support the formulation of policy statements, consultation responses or other specialist advice in relation to natural capital and heritage issues on behalf of ADEPT.
4. Influence policy and political priorities nationally, whilst supporting engagement and practical delivery at the local level.
5. Promote and support joint studies, research or trialling of new ways of working which address new opportunities or issues of concern.

In terms of the key priorities or imminent focus for the Working Group, these will include:

* Supporting the delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan through ADEPT, its constituent authorities and Local Nature Partnerships.
* Addressing the risks and opportunities associated with Brexit.
* Embedding Natural Capital principles within local strategy and promoting linkage to heritage interests.
* Identifying and removing barriers to the achievement of natural and historic environment outcomes through local authorities.

**Next Steps**

The Working Group is still at a very earlier stage in its development, although its role has been brought into sharp focus through the recent publication of the 25 Year Environment Plan. The next stage will involve refining the roles and priorities set out above and converting these into an initial action plan. An early milestone will be the planned ADEPT Workshop on the afternoon of the July meeting of the Environment Board.

Peter Chamberlain

Devon County Council

19/01/18