



Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

Spring Conference 2020 report

Thursday 21 May 2020

via Zoom

ADEPT held its first ever virtual conference on Thursday 21 May, via Zoom. More than 100 delegates registered, with approximately 70 attending.

The conference examined the question: What part can ADEPT members play, individually in their organisations and collectively, in supporting the transition to a new normal in the context of the pandemic and the climate emergency?

Outgoing ADEPT President, Darryl Eyers, opened by addressing the need to think beyond recovery to renewal and transformation and asking whether we really want to go back to the way everything was before this pandemic. While acknowledging how hard our economy has been hit, Darryl highlighted the positive impacts on the environment and public health, and the way many businesses have accelerated the culture change to digital and agile working. He also emphasised how impressed he has been by the response from the public sector and how proud he is to be a part of it.

Darryl summarised the challenges of his year as President and the achievements of ADEPT in that time – in the last 12 months the Association has:

- Confirmed our priorities around sustainable funding for local authorities, meeting the challenges of climate change, and communities and infrastructure.
- Brought together the associations for adults and children's social care, public health, the LGA, with ADEPT to make the case for more funding for LAs.
- Via our Engineering Board worked closely with colleagues in DfT to pull together an evidence base for additional investment in roads and infrastructure. Since the general election the Government has confirmed additional investment in highways and transport.
- Been a formative part of the new Highways Sector Council (HSC), which has brought together the public and private sector with responsibilities for highways, to work with government and look at how we can transform the sector. The HSC has produced invaluable guidance on how to maintain highways works safely during the lockdown and thinking about how to safely re-start the sector as we move into recovery.
- Launched our Climate Change Hub, which is pulling together practical case studies, tools, advice and guidance from across the country on how local areas are reducing carbon
- Begun working with Government to look at the potential for a climate change focussed version of live labs.
- Held workshops focussed on climate change via our Regional Boards.

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- Launched our *Excellence in Place Leadership* Programme sponsored by Amey, which has produced think pieces on outcomes-based commissioning of place-based services and green finance.

ADEPT's response to the coronavirus pandemic includes working with the HSC on guidance, with DfT on the implications for highways maintenance and bus services, and the excellent work by our Waste Group and Rights of Way Group capturing information to inform Defra and other government departments about the challenges local authorities face in regard to social distancing. Darryl also talked about our newly established Economic Recovery and Renewal Task Force which aims to ensure that national economic recovery planning considers the whole place system agenda, and goes further than recovery into renewal and transformation of economies and places. We also want to provide ADEPT members with the tools, information and guidance to enable them to deliver.

Darryl finished by talking about the strong relationships ADEPT has built over the last year with the other local officer associations (ADPH, ADASS, ADCS) and our work on diversity and inclusion within our own association. He finished by calling on members to recognise that we have a great opportunity to shape the next 12 months for ADEPT, our wider sector and set the direction for a new green future.

Provocations

The first session of the conference began with a series of 'provocations' from 6 contributors from different areas of the public, private and voluntary sector.

Matthew Taylor, RSA

Matthew Taylor opened the session with an introduction to the concept of 'bridges to the future', which is built around two frameworks: the first looking at the conditions that determine whether or not a crisis will lead to long-term intentional change and the second covering changes that have occurred during the crisis, which changes will be continued and which processes need to be brought back or altered as a result of the crisis.

Annie MacIver, MHCLG

Annie asked 'what is the new normal?' and underlined the key challenges we had before the COVID-19 crisis: climate change and regional economic inequality (including the acceleration of the decline of the high street). She highlighted the need to work across all timescales (short, medium and long term), the importance of a localised response and the importance of working across different areas (skills, employment support, business growth), and emphasised the need to speak with one voice.

Jonathan Werran, Localis

Jonathan talked about how to make the best use of time and funding available to modernise and invest in a future of a properly dynamic base. He mentioned that it is important from a place perspective to work at a local level to build up economic resilience and highlighted that going forward there will be new relations with central government.

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Jeanelle de Gruchy, ADPH

Jeanelle started by pointing out that COVID-19 has not been the leveller it was presented as in the early days of the crisis. She talked about the underlying inequalities in economy and health that have been brought to the fore as a result of the current situation, about the opportunities in terms of public health (more walking/cycling) and the recognition of the role of local government and about how important it is that director of Place and Public Health work closely together on recovery and renewal in a post-COVID world.

Mike Childs, Friends of the Earth

Mike spoke about the fear that the COVID-19 crisis may cause the climate change/green growth agenda to be sidelined and how important it is that we ensure that this doesn't happen. He encouraged ADEPT members to ensure that climate change and green growth are included in recovery plans, using examples of the significance of green space and the under-funding of cycling and walking. Mike also emphasised the importance of a collective and powerful voice to government.

Clare Hayward, Cheshire and Warrington LEP

Clare highlighted the opportunity to have a very powerful voice and the need to move to a place where we can help businesses make meaning and sense of what is going on, enabling innovation while also making sure we focus on growth. She asked ADEPT members to consider the question of how we work together to make sure we are focusing on both the short and longer term economic growth agenda.

Group discussions

There followed two breakout sessions where delegates discussed the transition and a path to the new normal. Session one focused on business, employment and the economy, while the second session looked at place and community.

The key themes and outputs from the breakout sessions were summarised and used to facilitate discussion during the afternoon session of the conference.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three timescales playing out in parallel (1) immediate, (2) wind-down of restrictions (3) transition/new normal • Need a place-based, community-focused argument in all 3: ADEPT and members must convene these conversations to influence local and national politicians • This will require a fresh approach to evidence, in its use, its communication, and local living labs 			<p>CONTEXT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Pay more, wait longer and get a little less” – Jonathan Werran • COVID-19 is not a leveller – it discriminates against the poorest in society – Jeanelle de Gruchy • “This is a global tragedy but positive change will come and we have a responsibility to plan for it” – Darryl Evers
<p>Death of “the office”: “We may never go back to the office as before”. This will fundamentally reshape land use. Local authority role: -handling consequences -actively shaping</p>	<p>Headspace: We need space to think about national and local implications. We must enhance skills and understanding in relation to communities</p>	<p>Skills and barriers to work: More imaginative and evidence-based approaches. Access to “good work” Place leaders must have the skills to lead this.</p>	
<p>Focus on HM Treasury: Close attention to influencing HM Treasury, CIPFA, local gov treasurers etc. plus ADASS/ADPH</p>	<p>Alignment: Strategies, policies and funding must be fit for purpose and aligned</p>	<p>Granular engagement with businesses: Need better understanding of businesses than ever before</p>	

Afternoon session

A lively discussion was initiated by Nigel Riglar, 1st Vice President of ADEPT, whose reflections included the emphasis during the group discussions on people and community, the challenges that local authorities will face around innovation and creativity when building bridges to the future and whether the ‘death of the office’ presents an opportunity to ADEPT to drive the agenda around place forward quicker than in the past.

Points raised during the subsequent discussion included:

- How the theme of resilient communities can feed into planning and thinking and the broader fit for infrastructure
- In terms of granular engagement, we need to take into account large businesses as well as smaller local businesses
- The importance of collaboration with other organisations and between the public and private sectors in moving forward
- The challenges of the ‘death of the office’ particularly in ensuring that silo working doesn’t become standard and cross-fertilisation of ideas can be nurtured

Close

Following the debate Darryl Evers closed the conference by thanking everyone for their contributions, reiterating how inspiring the public sector response to the COVID-19 crisis has been, and inviting delegates and ADEPT members to challenge themselves on how to join together all the aspects and themes for discussion during the day at a national and local level to deliver a bold green new future.