

ADEPT Engineering board – update January 2024

On 12th January 2024, a joint meeting was held between the ADEPT Engineering Board and the ADEPT Flood and Water Management Group to discuss enhanced ways of working between flood water management and highway professionals. Max Tant, FWMG Chair, gave an update on the much-awaited implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 which the Government is yet to formally consult on. Schedule 3 sets out a whole new process for requiring sustainable drainage solutions for new development with responsibility for approval potentially sitting with upper tier authorities, in conjunction with establishing an adoption mechanism. This represents a substantial change with 6 statutory instruments to be consulted on. Watch this space!

Dr Nick Mills from Southern Water then talked about the Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force, whose aim is to reduce storm overflows to ensure a healthy environment and water resilient future. Part of the approach is to hold back surface water runoff by using sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) but also to redirect building roof runoff into water butts and planters where they can. This was followed by Jo Bradley from Stormwater Shepherds talking through the damaging environmental impact of road run-off, explaining the untreated toxic cocktail of chemicals that run off can cause devastating impacts on plants and animals. Since the meeting, Jo has featured on national TV, giving an even more vivid illustration of unchecked, unfiltered motorway discharge into balancing ponds and watercourses. After Mark Stevens, Chair of the Engineering Board, explained what Haringey Council has been rolling out - rain gardens, swales, permeable paving, and filtered surface water discharge into adjacent greenspace – there was an exchange of ideas on how more could be done, based on lessons learnt. A key point from this debate was the importance of officers from drainage, highways and parks/greenspace management all working in unison to practically limit the overloading of the local surface water sewer network, ditches, and watercourses. A joint meeting between Haringey Council and Southern Water was held a few weeks later to share best practice in the respective organisations with an agreement to keep the dialogue going.

After a short break, the Engineering Board then continued with its substantive meeting, opening with Anthony Ferguson from the Department for Transport talking through the various elements of the Government's 'Plan for Drivers' which many transportation professions have been left scratching their heads over. Whilst the Plan for Drivers suggests a local authority pre-occupation with everything but the needs of motorists (so there is a view in Government that things need re-balancing), the transition to zero emissions driving (and the associated electric vehicle infrastructure required) appeared to be the only link to the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan. So, although it was interesting to hear the inside track on the subject and a reasonably lively discussion followed, it's still unclear quite how the Plan for Drivers should be interpreted and, less so, what actions local authorities should really take in response.

The broader DfT update focused mainly on Network North. The lack of transparency over funding in future years – i.e. from 2025/26 onwards – in both the document and the current baseline funding was a clear subject of concern amongst Engineering Board members. It was recognised it might take time before any real certainty is made clear. However, the Engineering Board's sub-group work on updating the Commuted Sums document has reached the final draft stage – a significant step forward that will only be surpassed by its finalisation and publication – so watch this space too