

Environment Board update January 2020

The Environment Board met on Monday 27th January in Defra's Nobel House. There were 19 attendees representing nine different councils plus partners from Defra, the Environment Agency and LEDNet.

We were pleased to welcome David Hill, the new Director General (Environment, Rural & Marine) at Defra. David gave a useful update on issues and priorities following the General Election, covering the Environment Bill, the COP26 climate change conference, EU exit, and some key events such as the Budget on 11th March and the spending review expected to start in the summer. He indicated that the Environment Bill would be similar to that introduced in October but would show an increase in government ambition in some areas. His hope that the Bill would be introduced in Parliament in the next few days turned out to be true (see separate item in the February newsletter). The Agriculture and Fisheries Bills are also due to be reintroduced.

On COP26, he welcomed ADEPT's engagement in the lead up to the event and invited us to contribute to communicating the UK's international leadership role on climate and environment. Defra will be leading work on the 'nature-based solutions workstream – one of the four main themes the government is to highlight. David stressed that it is understood at all government departments must contribute to meeting the net zero by 2050 target, and Permanent Secretaries have established a mechanism to co-ordinate climate change work across government.

Julia Beeden (Chair of the Flood & Water Management Working Group) led a discussion about the Environment Agency's *Challenges and Choices* consultation on river basin planning. This had been launched last October and had coincided with the Board's workshop on water quality. Julia ran through the main themes of the consultation and highlighted those where it was felt that we could make a constructive input. It was recognised that for some local authorities, water planning and quality is not high on the agenda partly because there are no specific statutory requirements. However, there is an opportunity to help think through how planning and transport influence water management, and vice versa – limits on the future supply of water are already starting to constrain new development in some areas. We can also consider how councils' own land-use management (e.g. through tenanted farms) could contribute. It was agreed that ADEPT would respond to the consultation, the questions will be circulated to Board and Working Group members, with comments back to Julia by 24th March for her to co-ordinate the final response.

Other business at this meeting included:

- reports back from Working Groups – Waste, Flood & Water Management, Natural Capital & Heritage, Energy, and the Local Adaptation Advisory Panel
- feedback from the Autumn Conference and January meeting of the Leadership Team
- the ADEPT work plan for 2020/21.

The Board's next meeting is scheduled for 23rd April.

In the afternoon there was a workshop, held jointly with the Sustainable Growth Board, on strategic planning for nature conservation. The workshop was led by Professor Alister Scott (Northumbria University) who has been commissioned by MHCLG to undertake research on this. Using a hypothetical case study of two neighbouring LPAs on the urban/rural fringe, participants worked in groups to identify strategic planning challenges, and to suggest improvements to the process and the best approach to planning for nature conservation. Alister took away all the outputs from the workshop to write up and circulate.