**Joint meeting of Environment Board and Planning, Housing & Regeneration Board, 18 April 2018**

The meeting was well attended with representatives from 11 councils plus colleagues from three Government departments (MCHLG, DEFRA and BEIS), two agencies (Environment Agency and Natural England), and other partners including LEDNet and the ADPH.

The first half of the morning focused on the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework currently out to consultation. The guest speaker was Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner at the MHCLG. Steve outlined the main points about the revised NPPF including the continued presumption in favour of sustainable development and a stronger duty to co-operate. He said that local Plans should reflect Local Industrial Strategies and deliver ‘net gain’ for the environment – the NPPF refers to the 25 Year Environment Plan but doesn’t repeat it. Specific points included clearer protection for ancient woodland, and development of brownfield sites in the Green Belt can be acceptable. He felt that the public mood towards new housing in their neighbourhoods is changing, people are now more likely to accept new development where it is well designed.

In the wide ranging discussion that followed, key issues raised included:

* Energy efficiency and building regulations, and the need for large developments to have an energy statement
* Quality of design
* How environmental net gain will be measured – DEFRA is leading some work here, and linking to work on natural capital
* Green infrastructure and space, including ecological networks and protecting habitats
* Green Belt
* Affordable housing and how this is defined – the challenge is how people on low incomes can access genuinely affordable housing to buy or rent
* Developers/section 106 process – the credibility of this is undermined by developers seeking to renegotiate agreements once planning permission has been granted.

The second half of the meeting followed this up with a closer look at making the case for green infrastructure in new developments. The guest speaker was Gemma Jerome, Building With Nature Manager at the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Gemma introduced the new BWN benchmark for the design and maintenance of green infrastructure in housing and commercial development – a simple accreditation and branding scheme – that can be applied to many developments including social and affordable housing. Her presentation included a number of case studies.

Various issues were raised in the subsequent discussion:

* The threshold for BWN, the benchmark has been used by small (20 units) and large (1,500+) developments
* How BWN might work within London
* A DEFRA/Natural England green infrastructure standards project – ADEPT are invited to have a representative on the advisory group
* Climate change resilience in green infrastructure, and making this more explicit.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the joint meeting had been fruitful, and that there are other areas of common interest that would be worth exploring in possible future joint meetings.

**David Dale**