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Professor Dieter Helm  
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**The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP**  
From the Secretary of State

Dear Professor Helm,

Thank you for your letter and providing me with a copy of the previous Committee's third *State of Natural Capital* report, which I have considered with interest. It is an exciting and interesting time following the outcome of the referendum and we now have a once in a generation opportunity to set the vision for the environment we want and put in place the mechanisms that will make this a reality.

I would like to reassure the Committee that I remain committed to the production of an ambitious 25 year plan for the environment and look forward to your continued input. I agree that we must maintain the momentum and enthusiasm surrounding the development of the plan. As you will be aware, we have now aligned the boundaries between Natural England and the Environment Agency. Working to the newly agreed 14 shared Area model will ensure continued integration around our delivery and decision-making at the local level across the Defra group.

Over the course of July, officials from Defra, Natural England, Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission have held a series of workshops in these areas to begin the conversation with key organisations. These explored the priorities they would like to see included in the Environment Plan and gather suggestions for how we ensure it has real resonance and impact at both the national and local level. Officials will share a summary of these discussions with the Committee later this month.

I agree with you that we need to press on with our work on the "Pioneer" projects, which will help us to identify good practice and innovative solutions as we develop and begin to implement the Environment Plan. I agree also with your earlier advice that they should operate in four different settings so that they can test the best analytical tools, data and governance approaches in a range of situations.

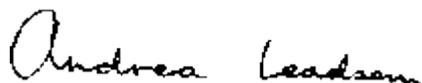
I therefore hope that a "Catchment" Pioneer in Cumbria; an "Urban" Pioneer in the Greater Manchester area; a "Landscape" Pioneer in North Devon; and a "Marine" Pioneer across two sites, one in East Anglia and an additional component in Devon to complement the Landscape Pioneer can immediately begin to support communities and decision-makers as they work to improve the environment within their areas. Although unfunded projects, there are a range of opportunities to brigade resources whilst focusing on different local areas and situations.



I see these as very open projects, working with and building on the excellent work of the many groups in other areas the country that work innovatively and tirelessly to enhance our environment. I want us to continue to engage widely with these local initiatives, learning lessons from as many sources as possible over the next few years.

Thank you for your offer to provide advice on policy priorities following the EU referendum. I would welcome an early meeting with you and your Committee in autumn. My office will be in touch to make these arrangements.

Best wishes,



**Andrea Leadsom MP**  
**Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**