Dear Lord Cameron,

**Supplementary information to the NERC Act Committee**

May I thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to your Committee on 18 July. I am writing to provide the further information requested by the Committee.

1. **An organogram / job descriptions of the Defra Rural Policy Team (Q2)**

   I attach an organogram for the Rural Policy Team in Defra and an explanatory note on the work of the Rural Policy team which I hope the Committee finds helpful. Rural housing is one of the responsibilities of another team reporting to me that considers wider land use issues. As I mentioned, there is also a separate team responsible for managing the Rural Development Programme in England.

   The Rural Policy Team supports Lord Gardiner in his role of Rural Affairs Minister and Rural Ambassador. The team does not operate in a silo, and works not only with many teams in Defra to ensure rurality is at the heart of the department, but also across Whitehall to deliver this. It maintains close links with other government departments in order to help them shape their policies so they take account of the needs, challenges and opportunities facing rural areas.

   The team also acts as a centre of expertise for the provision, analysis and mapping of rural statistical evidence, promotes the use of the rural-urban classification, and works with other government departments to improve the understanding of rural issues through statistical evidence. This includes the development and maintenance of a rural evidence hub on gov.uk.

2. **A note on training workshops with other departments (Q3).**

   As I noted in my oral evidence, in conjunction with the Cabinet Office, we organised a workshop on 2 April to explain the recently revised guidance on rural proofing to a wide range of departments, including the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for Culture, Media and Sports, the Department for Education, the Department for Health and the Department for Transport. Since then, we have run a workshop on the guidance at HM Customs and Excise.
In addition to this, the statisticians within the Rural Policy Team have planned a targeted programme of engagement and training to extend the availability and use of rural statistical analysis. This will cover the most relevant departments in turn and will start with the Department of Transport.

3. **A note detailing the meeting between Lord Gardiner of Kimble and DCMS regarding tourism (Q8)**

Lord Gardiner has had several meetings with Ministers in DCMS on issues falling within their responsibility. He last discussed tourism with Tracey Crouch MP, the minister responsible for tourism, by telephone in August 2016. The discussion covered the inquiry into rural tourism being conducted by the EFRA Committee in the House of Commons, the focus being agreement between the two Ministers that DCMS would lead the government’s response with Defra support, which was in keeping with the principles of rural proofing. The government submitted written evidence which set out its position on rural tourism in answer to the questions posed by that Committee. This can be found at the following link: [http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/rural-tourism/written/40488.html](http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/rural-tourism/written/40488.html). It includes references to rural proofing. Lord Gardiner and Tracey Crouch had planned to meet before they jointly gave oral evidence to the EFRA Committee but the inquiry was cut short because of the General Election.

4. **Information from Natural England**

I attach three documents produced by Natural England to address the other areas where the Committee requested supplementary information. These are:

- Statistics on Natural England’s response to planning applications and consultations (Q4)
- A note on powers concerning notifiable/injurious weeds, especially ragwort (Q6)
- A note on the implementation of Sir John Lawton’s ‘Making Space for Nature’ (Q7)

Yours sincerely

Shirley Trundle CBE
Director
Natural Environment
QUESTION: Amount of planning application cases we have processed in recent years (across the piece, sites and species)?

Natural England is a statutory consultee for the planning system in England.

Natural England responded to 12,852 planning application consultations from Local Planning Authorities in 2016/17, with 97% of these responded to within the agreed timeframe.

In the past three financial years we have reported the following figures on the numbers of formal planning consultations submitted to us by a local planning authority (LPA) to DCLG. The report we submit (which includes a slightly more detailed breakdown) is published on GOV.UK at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-englands-response-times-to-planning-consultations-in-england

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
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<tr>
<td>Planning application consultations from Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) with substantive response</td>
<td>12,882</td>
<td>12,842</td>
<td>12,852</td>
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The Committee should note that ‘substantive responses’ include detailed advice, outright objections (very few), ‘no-comment’ and ‘no further comment’ responses. Since autumn 2013 we have employed our standing advice for protected species and most of our responses would refer to this standing advice. The figures above do not include consultations from LPAs which involve the discharge of planning conditions.

Natural England’s standing advice for protected species, which is published on GOV.UK, helps LPAs understand how protected species on or near a proposed development site might be affected by the development, and therefore whether there is a need to formally consult us on a planning application.
‘Non-substantive responses’ include informal emails or telephone calls which might include a request for further information, which we would expect to be re-consulted with (and which might then require a substantive response), plus other general ad-hoc requests.

It may interest the committee to understand that, although the figures above appear relatively static, we have introduced improvements designed to manage down the number of consultations we receive during this period, which might otherwise have seen a rise in numbers.

As well as our standing advice, we have introduced our Impact Risk Zones tool, a GI based spatial mapping tool, which can assist LPAs in assessing the likely impacts of a development on nature conservation sites, and therefore whether they need to consult Natural England. Figures to the end of May 2017 show 177 LPAs have downloaded the IRZs dataset. A less detailed version is also available to the public on MAGIC.

Table 2

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<th>Metric</th>
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<th>2016-17</th>
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<tr>
<td>Terrestrial and Marine planning all items (including strategic plans, pre-app) including items from developers, consultants and other consulting bodies.</td>
<td>Approx. 26,000</td>
<td>Approx. 25,000</td>
<td>Approx. 24,000</td>
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In terms of the overall numbers of consultations we receive from all quarters (ie from developers, consultants and other consulting bodies), the total number is more difficult to quantify, as they may include requests for advice on proposals which subsequently become formal consultations via LPAs and are counted in the figures at Table 1.

The figures at Table 2 include requests for advice before a proposal is formally submitted to an LPA for consideration (pre-application advice) and advice on strategic plans (in support of local authority local plan development).
QUESTION: Powers and progress on injurious weeds (e.g. Common Ragwort)

Natural England (NE) has a number of roles including arranging site visits, assessing priorities of the complaints relating to Common Ragwort (ragwort) and other injurious weeds and managing a helpline, which is the initial contact point for any concerns.

The primary aim of Defra’s policy on injurious weeds is to protect livestock and agricultural activities. NE give priority to complaints where:

- weeds are threatening land used for:
  - keeping or grazing horses and other livestock, or
  - farmland used to produce conserved forage, or
  - other agricultural activities, and;
- the complainant has made reasonable efforts to contact the landowner or occupier where the weeds are growing and the owner/occupier has failed to take action to control the spread of the weeds.

Therefore, low risk complaints or complaints regarding non-agricultural land are not taken forward.

When NE receive a complaint which merits investigation, it is followed up with a letter to the land owner/occupier asking them to take remedial action. When appropriate action is not taken, Natural England arrange for land to be visited to ascertain if injurious weeds are present. The first visit is conducted by inspectors from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) who have powers to issue an enforcement notice. They examine the land, record the volume of injurious weeds found and assess the threat to neighbouring land used for agriculture and/or used for keeping of animals. If the inspector deems that a risk exists they issue the land owner with an enforcement notice with a time frame for them to take appropriate action. This notice requires the landowner to control their injurious weeds within a specific timeframe.

If the required actions are not completed by the owner/occupier within the prescribed period, a Natural England Adviser may undertake a further visit to the land. In certain circumstances where further action is judged to be required the adviser may issue a legally enforceable clearance notice. This is, in effect, the last request made to the land owner and categorically states their requirements under the provisions of the Weeds Act 1959. These clearance notices

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1 Curled and Broadleaved Dock; Spear Thistle and Creeping or Field Thistle.
are rare as the vast majority of land owners fully appreciate and understand their obligations regarding ragwort, accept their responsibilities and plan and act accordingly to tackle any injurious weeds infestations well before they get to this stage. Unfortunately, it is the small minority that do require our intervention and the reminders of their responsibilities under the Weeds Act 1959.

Defra has overall policy responsibility for the legislative framework of the Weeds Act 1959. A strong working relationship exists with Defra and Natural England to ensure that advice on the more difficult cases can be readily sought and any subsequent decisions can be discussed and fully considered. Defra and Natural England also work in partnership to ensure that the policy and operational procedures to address injurious weeds remain effective, e.g. meeting yearly to review the level of complaints received; and reviewing/updating the Combined Instructions and Guidance for the Operations of the Weeds Act 1959 as appropriate.

Defra and Natural England worked with a number of bodies to raise awareness of ragwort. For example, Defra worked in partnership with the British Horse Society (BHS) to raise awareness and develop improved guidance for equine owners. This guidance was launched as an online toolkit on the BHS website in 2014 – please see the following link: http://www.bhs.org.uk/welfare-and-care/ragwort-toolkit-country-selection.

Defra also funded BHS research aimed at developing a better understanding about ragwort and its impact on horse health. This research was also discussed with other stakeholders at a ragwort summit which included environmental organisations, Defra and agencies, including Natural England and public or infrastructure owning bodies e.g. Network Rail.

Many local authorities also have plans in place to work with local communities and on the land they control to offer guidance in addressing issues relating to injurious weeds as outlined in the Weed Act 1959. Examples of support here include reminding local authorities about their responsibilities on ragwort and other injurious weeds listed in the Weeds Act 1959 by clarifying guidance on the Code of Practice on How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort for the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE), through a blog post on the Local Authority Knowledge Hub (https://khub.net); and by working with the Health and Safety Executive to amend herbicide labels to clarify the risks of dead or dying ragwort plants to farm animals – please see the following link: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides/news/information-update-0516.htm. In 2013, the Rt Hon Richard Benyon MP also wrote to all public bodies to remind them of their responsibilities towards controlling injurious weeds.

Natural England are working with both Network Rail and Highways England, encouraging them to work with their neighbours in regards to their estates, including tackling injurious weeds and invasive species. The Committee may be interested to note that Natural England is involved in work to control the spread of these weeds through work under the Water Framework Directive on the River Axe in East Devon. Here a three year project with partners has been delivered, investing £100k to employ a Project Manager to coordinate the project to both...
manage and eradicate invasive non-native plants such as Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed in that area.

Through its ‘Green Transport Corridors’ project Natural England has been working in partnership with Network Rail and Highways England on two Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs), the Humberhead Levels NIA and Morecambe Bay NIA with the Yorkshire and Cumbria Wildlife Trusts to explore new approaches to the management of the soft estate in order to:

- increase the resilience of the transport network and enhance its ability to adapt to the effects of climate change,
- reduce operational risks for the transport network operators
- deliver new or enhanced green infrastructure and associated ecosystem services
- enhance ecological connectivity and reduce fragmentation
- deliver landscape-scale benefits
- enhance landscape-character and value
- enhance indirect experience of biodiversity and contact with the natural environment for people and communities
- contribute to local green growth.

As part of the wider management of the road and rail ‘soft estate’ the two pilot projects have incorporated measures to address invasive non-native plants and injurious weeds, such as Ragwort, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. This includes the removal and ongoing control of these species in liaison and co-operation with adjacent landowners, using weed treatment alongside other measures to enhance sward such as wildflower seeding, and use of cutting regimes to manage ongoing risk. The wider benefits of maintaining green infrastructure alongside road and rail estate are set out in the published digest by the Linear Infrastructure Network, which sets out how maintaining green infrastructure can enhance asset resilience and performance, as well as delivering an improved return on investment.

The Committee might like to note that this work sits within the wider partnership work that Natural England have proactively taken forward in partnership with Highways England and Network Rail on green infrastructure, eco-systems services and ‘no net loss’ in biodiversity. This is detailed further in the ‘Connectivity’ section of the supplementary note provided to the Committee by Natural England on progress against Lawton recommendations.
QUESTION: Feedback on progress made against the overarching recommendations of the Lawton Report?

The Committee requested feedback on progress that had been made against the overarching recommendations of the Lawton report. The report stated that the following three areas should be addressed in establishing a strong and connected natural environment:

- That we better protect and manage our designated wildlife sites;
- That we establish new Ecological Restoration Zones;
- That we better protect our non-designated wildlife sites;

Lawton also noted that society’s need to maintain water-quality, manage inland flooding, deal with coastal erosion and enhance carbon storage, if thought about creatively, could help deliver a more effective ecological network.

The Committee will recognise that most of Natural England’s core operations contribute towards achieving outcomes that support the overarching aims suggested by the Lawton Report. Some of our key achievements towards that include:

**Designation of nationally important sites for biodiversity:**

- Natural England has supported the designation of 27 new marine Conservation Zones that cover 8000 square km of offshore and 2000 square km of inshore waters. Since the introduction of the Marine & Coastal Access Act in 2009 there are now currently 38 designated MCZs within 12nm of the English coast (3 of these cross the 12nm boundary), and 50 MCZs in UK waters altogether. The designated MCZs cover 3316 km$^2$ or 6% of the marine area out to 12nm.
- 60 different types of habitats, species and geological features are currently protected in the English inshore MCZs.
- Natural England has provided pre-consultation advice to Defra on 63 inshore or cross (12nm) boundary MCZs as part of the third and final tranche of MCZ designations.
- Natural England (and its predecessors) has now notified 4,126 SSSIs with a cumulative area of 1,092,700ha. In the last year, a total of 8,195 ha of SSSI has been newly notified, the highest total since Natural England vesting.
- Since vesting in October 2006, Natural England has notified (including re-notifications and de-notifications) 50 SSSI cases resulting in a net increase of over 14,000 ha in the SSSI series. 26 wholly new SSSIs have been notified.

**Biodiversity 2020 programme:**

- Natural England has worked in partnership to drive delivery of 2020 outcomes fundamental to achieving Lawton’s ambition and to secure more, bigger, better and joined up habitat. In enhancing and improving our most important sites for wildlife and biodiversity the target of
ensuring that 95% of SSSIs are in favourable or recovering condition has been achieved (achieving an increase from 57% in just 8 years).

- 1,296,936 ha of priority habitats within and outside SSSIs – 64% of the total – have been restored or maintained through appropriate management and are now in favourable or recovering condition.
- Just over 100,000 hectares of priority habitat have been created to meet Biodiversity 2020 and no-net loss targets.
- Nature Improvement Areas delivered 13,664 ha of maintenance and improvement activity on existing priority habitat (the equivalent to about a quarter of the size of the New Forest National Park); restoration and creation of 4,625 ha of new priority habitat, and management of 225 km of linear and boundary habitats such as rivers and hedgerows over the three years of the programme delivering multiple benefits such as: improved habitat connectivity; development of recreational corridors; creation of open spaces; and the enhancement of ecosystem services. Since the closure of the funded programme in 2015, NIAs have maintained direction and input to increase understanding, and inform evolving landscape and catchment scale delivery approaches.
- Natural England has secured support from Protected Areas including National Parks and AONBs (containing some of the most critical areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services); who are in the process of engaging in the use of an eco-system approach self-assessment tool that has been designed and developed to support the development of local management plans that deliver outcomes in an integrated way at the scales required to maximise ecosystem service benefits for people and biodiversity. The eco-system approach self-assessment tool is also being promoted with other organisations across sectors and represents an effective means to get organisations and their partnerships in a position to drive Lawton’s ambition effectively.
- Currently Natural England is reviewing data available to compile a clearer picture of progress for bespoke restoration activity achieved on key areas of habitat critical to climate change mitigation and adaptation, including woodland, wetland and coastal habitats.
- Recognising the increased fragmentation and isolation of key habitats that has led to declines in the provision of some ecosystem services, and losses to species populations; combined with the efforts to achieve more, bigger, better and joined up habitat through Biodiversity 2020 Natural England has worked closely, with the support of species NGOs to bring together data on species and complete work to identify the most critical actions for England’s most threatened species.
- Natural England’s Species Recovery Programme projects are underway to help support some of those actions, and combined with other NGO projects to date; these have helped to reestablish or increase populations of threatened species like Bitterns, Large Blue Butterflies, Warbiter Crickets, Short-haired Bumblebees and Stinking Hawksbeard.
- Working with NGOs including Amphibian and Reptile Trust, Bat Conservation Trust, Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife and RSPB; Natural England submitted a successful application to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in March this year that has secured £4.6 million to save 20 species on the brink of extinction and benefit a further 200 additional species.

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF):

- Diffuse pollution from agriculture has been reduced through catchment sensitive farming working with 16,133 farm holdings covering 2.3 million hectares.
The project has been running since 2006 and has delivered advice to around 19,300 farm holdings covering approximately 2.6 million hectares of land, CSF is now supporting delivery of grants and land management agreements through Countryside Stewardship.

The Capital Grant Scheme contributed to approximately £89m of environmental improvement, a total at least match-funded by the recipient farmers. Overall 203,054 individual mitigation measures have been advised to farmers.

85% of farmers involved in CSF say they now give water pollution management a higher priority.

CSF has contributed to a 50% reduction in pesticides in our rivers.

In 2016/17 CSFOs engaged with 3,346 farmers in high priority areas leading to a potential of 2,054 CS agreements being received.

CSF has been working in 24 bathing water catchments which have agricultural inputs. CSFOs have engaged with around 800 farms resulting in 430,000 measures being recommended, focusing on manure and fertiliser management, infrastructure and soil management.

Designations and access:

- Some 24.3% of land in England is now covered by National Park (NP) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designations.
- The South Downs National Park has been created and the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks have been extended.
- There are 224 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) in England covering over 94,000 ha (0.72% of the terrestrial area of England).
- Natural England manages 143 of the NNRs on its own or jointly with others, and the remainder are managed by Partners (e.g. National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and Forestry Commission etc.).
- Natural England designates, and manages over 60% of, National Nature Reserves. NNRs are a voluntary ‘accolade’ and outperform any other nature conservation designation with:
  - 53.5% in Favourable condition
  - Contains most ‘Section 41’ protected species (our most rare)
  - Over 800 research programmes
  - 1,800 active volunteers (on Natural England’s NNRs) and friends of groups, valued at £3.6m worth of annual work completed.
- Our NNRs attract 4 million visitors annually, with 17 million across the wider network and have 700 km of rights of way and 18,577 ha of Access Land.
- Natural England has produced a joint strategy for the network working in greater partnership NNR-managing organisations to secure environmental gains. For example, the Ribble NNR in Lancashire is being extended by 1,180 hectares of important bird habitat by working with RSPB and EA, without any additional costs to NE.
- When completed, at 2,700 miles long, the England Coast Path will be the longest coastal walking route in the world.
- At year-end we had submitted 1,048 kilometres to the Secretary of State for approval and had 534 kilometres ready. A further 244 kilometres has been carried forward into 2017/18. (KPI)
- Currently we’re working on 1,885 miles of the 2,700 mile English coast of which:
  - 500 miles has been submitted to government for approval, of which:
  - 379 miles have been approved, of which:
- 314 miles are open.
- Some 313 million visits were made to the English coast between March 2014 and February 2015 and seeing a 138% increase in visits using paths and trails.
- 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) have been completed and published.

**Connectivity**
The Committee also touched upon the issue of ‘connectivity’. Natural England has been working proactively with both Highways England and Network Rail to help them deliver their ambitions for biodiversity net gain. As a result;

- Highways England are committed to delivering No Net Loss in biodiversity during Roads Investment Period 2 and Biodiversity Net Gain by 2040
- Network Rail’s Infrastructure Projects have set the target of “a measurable net positive contribution towards biodiversity in the UK” and are piloting approaches with the aim to make Net Gain ‘business-as-usual’ by March 2019

Other measures include:
- Natural England led the establishment of the Linear Infrastructure Network. LINet has brought together the expertise of organisations and businesses with the purpose of better understanding the opportunities to be gained from well-maintained green infrastructure, versus the liabilities created by poorly-maintained green infrastructure. It has recently published a digest explaining in statistical terms how incorporating green infrastructure into linear infrastructure can enhance asset resilience and performance, as well as delivering an improved return on investment.
- Natural England is a member of Highways England’s Design Panel which was established under the HE license and is seeking to embed a design-led approach with the ambition of raising the bar on integrated place-responsive design. It is helping Highways England design an inclusive, resilient and sustainable road network through a visionary approach to enhancing an area at a landscape scale that reflects in its design the beauty of the natural and built environment through which it passes.
- We are also working to explore innovative ways that the estate can be managed to reduce whole life costs, such as through the harvesting of biomass for bio-energy, and enabling greater access to the networks through closer working with adjacent landowners and rural payment schemes.

**Conservation Strategy:**
Natural England has also launched a new Conservation Strategy, Conservation 21 (C21). In essence, it is primarily focussed on delivering the kind of outcomes the Lawton report prescribes. In developing the strategy the following five areas were identified where we felt a significant step change in the way we work, namely:

- **Environmental Outcomes:** An environment that supports resilient ecosystems, functioning ecological networks and high levels of natural capital, delivering multiple benefits for people and nature.

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The Ecosystem Approach: Adopting the ecosystem approach - building on good practice to encourage and embed the ecosystem approach, delivering long term environmental improvements that take account of multiple interests and benefits.

Valuing the Environment: Ensuring that the value of the environment is properly understood, receiving adequate investment and recognised in decisions, so that it continues to provide the range of benefits people require.

Behavioural Change: To motivate, incentivise, and build society's support for and commitment to improving the natural environment.

Longer Term benefits: Implementing mechanisms for achieving long(er) term benefits from investment in the environment.

The strategy brings together our own and others’ experiences of what works and the latest science and evidence, with innovative approaches, new partnerships and different ways of thinking about nature and the benefits it provides. The three guiding principles within the strategy are to:

- Promote a shift of focus, to a larger scale, to create resilient landscapes and seas, moving beyond sites to think about ecological networks, landscapes and ecosystems, and to become more integrated in our delivery.
- Putting people at the heart of the environment and helping people recognise the relevance of the natural environment to their day to day lives and the choices they make, inspiring them to be more imaginative and ambitious for the natural world around them. We will work to co-create shared plans for places - reflecting a combination of larger scale working, engaging early and strategically to help people come together to co-create solutions that deliver multiple outcomes, and supporting local ownership and governance.
- To embrace the concept of natural capital as a powerful new way to help us all better understand what we get from the natural world, and to move away from 'renting' outcomes to securing long term and sustainable environmental investment. We will work with others to develop the appropriate national policy framework, monitoring approaches and delivery tools to put the concept of natural capital into practice.

Our ambition is for a healthy, resilient natural environment, benefitting people and the economy. We know we cannot achieve our ambition alone. We need to change our ways of working to focus on creating and delivering against the big opportunities, thinking longer term, and continuing to embed the outcomes approach. We will work with a wider range of organisations and sectors, engaging at the outset, and be clearer when we need to role model, lead, facilitate or advise, and when we can step back.

A copy of the Conservation Strategy document is attached for the Committee’s information and reference.

Area Team Plans:
Natural England’s Area Teams have identified over 100 focus areas where we plan to target our efforts. Focus areas are places where we see opportunities to do more this year. In practice this means trying to prioritise those areas that will enable us to deliver the most long term outcomes and where we will work hardest to establish shared objectives with our partners. This is a deliberate decision to make sure we push new boundaries with partners to deliver environmental benefits, rather than just focusing on numerical targets.
A copy of our Area Team Plans are enclosed which show all the focus areas and the work we are doing across these plans on a landscape scale. Our local teams have captured their plans in a suite of 14 posters called 'It’s In Our Nature' which give a real flavour of what we want to achieve across the country this year. We have also developed an overview to show how our plans reflect the direction of travel in our Conservation Strategy and the Defra 25-year plan and also attach that for your reference.

7 September 2017
### Sarah Severn. Deputy Director, Rural Policy Team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team assistant</th>
<th>Grade 6 – Deputy Head, Rural Policy Team</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Evidence – Economics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rural Evidence – Statistics</strong></td>
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<td>• advice and analysis on the non-farming parts of rural economies, including developing evidence on the dynamics of - and potential for improved - economic activity in rural areas.</td>
<td>• provision, analysis and mapping of rural statistical evidence</td>
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<td><strong>Rural Life Opportunities</strong></td>
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<td>• work with government departments in key areas, such as education, skills, post office, health, transport and energy.</td>
<td>• work with government departments in key areas, such as broadband, mobile, tourism and local government financing.</td>
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<td>• sponsorship of the ACRE network.</td>
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<td>• ministerial visits programme and meetings</td>
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