Thank you for your letter of 20 March, and for the Environmental Audit Committee’s continued engagement with the UK’s Voluntary National Review (VNR) into the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are entering a critical final phase in delivering the UK’s first VNR to the UN. DFID has just concluded a series of engagement events, including the event in Parliament which you attended on 11 March. These events brought together a diverse range of voices from business, faith groups, local organisations and wider civil society and their contributions will be a central component of our final VNR report. Since beginning the VNR process last year, the Government has held at least 34 engagement events and consulted with over 350 organisations, either directly or through the VNR website. I hope you agree that this is a significant achievement and demonstrates my commitment to ensuring an inclusive VNR that showcases activity across the UK.

As you mention in your letter, the Government produced an Emerging Findings and Further Engagement Document with the aim of providing additional information to inform the engagement events. This was never intended as a draft VNR but rather a means to encourage debate, contributions and suggestions. It has been a helpful tool in prompting robust and informed input from a range of actors which will be reflected in the final report. I note your specific concerns relating to areas and policies that were not covered in the document and my officials continue to work across Government to ensure the final VNR is as comprehensive as possible.

I will ensure my Department fully cooperates with the Committee’s upcoming inquiry. I gave evidence to the International Development Committee’s inquiry into the VNR and SDGs on 19 March and I will appear again in early summer to discuss the UK’s international contribution to the Goals. DFID will provide written evidence to the EAC’s inquiry on behalf of HMG, responding to the questions outlined in the terms of reference.
My Ministerial colleague, Lord Bates, has been closely involved in the VNR process since it commenced last year and will be available to appear before your Committee later this month. We will, of course, consider the views of the Committee, and other Select Committee Chairs, ahead of the VNR being submitted in June.

Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP
Secretary of State