

I saying that it does not really matter? Far from it. The main justification of Government support for afforestation is that it gives a clear signal to Industry that we are planning ahead and that we intend to make sure that expanding timber supplies are available in the next century. We are saying to industrialists that they can make long-term investments with confidence, because the raw material will be there. In giving planting grants to landowners we are not wet-nursing them, as some people think; we are investing in a primary resource of importance to the nation.

I hold no brief for some of the quite unjustified attacks that are made on forestry, but I do recognise the widespread concern that forestry should not expand in ways insensitive to our countryside. We are entitled, therefore, to expect forestry to recognise this, with full regard for landscaping, nature conservation and other land use interests. These are not add-on requirements; they must be an inherent part of forest planning. These high standards will be expected in applications under the Woodland Grant Scheme. There is a great deal of guidance available—on landscaping, on nature conservation, on the need to take account of possible archaeological interest and on the care to be taken when planting near watercourses. These are but a few examples, and the commitment of Timber Growers to these standards is well demonstrated by their Forestry and Woodland Code. I would hope that all owners of potential woodlands would look carefully at their proposals and ask themselves the question, "How would they stand up if an Environmental Assessment was required?" I mentioned EA deliberately. Many people regard the development of EA as another nail in the coffin of forestry; that any request for an EA is a call to stop forestry. This is far from the case. An EA will be requested where the Forestry Commission believes that the proposals will be particularly sensitive in environmental terms. In other words that it requires the information provided by an environmental statement to enable better informed decisions to be reached. Of course it could result in the application being rejected but, equally, it could result in modifications being made and a first class scheme going ahead.

It is important to ensure that forestry takes place in harmony with other interests. By and large I think this is the case and that the consultation procedures, administered by the Forestry Commission as the Government's forestry authority, are doing their job. These procedures have been steadily improved over the years in the light of experience and we must never close our minds to change—particularly that aimed at improving confidence, effectiveness and efficiency. A case in point is the change which was introduced to allow greater public participation in disputed cases. We must ensure, however, that our resources are concentrated where they will do the most good. Bureaucracy costs taxpayers money and we must always have an eye to obtaining value for that money. The consultation procedures help to determine not only where forestry takes place but also the modifications necessary to take account of other interests.

This leads me on to say something about the relationship between

forestry and agriculture in Scotland—as you know, I have responsibility for both. Agriculture in Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK, is going through a period of major change, with various estimates being made of the amount of land that will have to be taken out of production if we are going to get on top of the problem of surpluses. Scotland is, however, caught up by these general measures to reform the CAP, without being guilty of adding much to these surpluses. That is a story for another day, but its relevance is that we intend to maintain a viable hill-sheep industry in Scotland and to continue to protect farming structures in socially fragile rural areas. I make no apology for this—quite the reverse—agriculture is one of Scotland's most important industries and it is our policy that it should remain so.

Nevertheless, there is now a new emphasis on encouraging planting "down the hill" and, although we will continue to protect prime quality agricultural land—a scarce and valuable resource in Scotland—areas of less productive arable land are now being cleared for forestry under arrangements worked out between the Department of Agriculture and the Forestry Commission. This offers exciting opportunities for forestry—opportunities for higher production, for planting a greater diversity of species, and for integrating with farming. A whole new chapter is being opened up, and one of which, I hope, many will take advantage.

Farmers themselves are being encouraged to plant trees under the Farm Woodland Scheme and the woodland provisions of Set-Aside. The Farm Woodland Scheme has only recently been launched and, while it is still early days it has attracted a great deal of interest and there has been an encouraging initial response in Scotland. The aim is that throughout Great Britain as a whole, some 36,000 hectares of planting will take place over a three year period. At the end of that time the scheme will be reviewed. All this means that farmers are now giving a great deal of thought to forestry and the multiple benefits which increased woodland cover on farms can bring in terms of shelter, landscaping, nature conservation as well as wood production. We in this country—unlike the Continent of Europe—do not have a recent strong tradition of farm forestry. That is now set to alter and I think it is a very exciting prospect. Encouragement for the planting of better land is also being given under the Woodland Grant Scheme in the form of a supplement of £200 per hectare for planting on arable or improved grassland. It remains to be seen what effect this will have but, on occasions, whole farms in the lowlands may come out of agriculture altogether and go over to forestry. I do not see this becoming commonplace but we have already seen examples of this in north east Scotland. The move of forestry down the hill will bring a double benefit—not only will forestry be allowed the use of better land but a better balance will be achieved between planting in the uplands and planting on the lower ground. Nevertheless, the Scottish uplands will continue to be the place where much new planting takes place. And a large part of this new planting will be with conifers which grow well and