

Consultation on forestry provisions in the Scottish Climate Changes Bill.

I think that there is some confusion in the minds of the proponents of this Bill.

We have in Scotland a considerable acreage of timber, established during World War One, under the newly established Forestry Commission, to provide a reliable source of indigenous timber, principally for the use of the coal mining industry so as to take the place of imported pit props, for instance. Clearly other industrial uses for the timber planted at this time, was also foreseen, and provided for. Housing is only one of these other uses.

The choice of trees for this scheme demanded species which were of relatively rapid maturation, regular growth and constant cross section. This led to the use of various exotic conifers as the tree of choice. To provide pit props, for instance.

Coal has become very much less of a source of energy in the last thirty years, through working out of the old established coal fields, the easily won, shallow coal and to a great extent, those coal assets which used to be strip mined.

Therefore the need for coal-related timber resources has ceased to be an urgent requirement in the UK.

However the forestry schemes which are still with us, and which are still planted by the Forestry Commission (and others), does not seem to have taken on board this change of demand. We see still, vast areas of countryside planted with conifers; usually Douglas Fir and Sitka Spruce. For economy they are planted in artificially dense schemes, allowing little or no light to penetrate between the trunks, and all are ill-populated by any sort of wild life, being foreign to this country and its birds and insects.

In brief I maintain that if the Forestry Commission is to continue to provide planting of trees in the countryside, then they should undertake a wholesale reassessment of what is required, and where, and in what quantity. The broad continuation of 'Business as usual' should be confined to the waste paper basket of past habits, and the whole business re-thought.

The questions posed at the end of the consultation paper could therefore be answered as follows.

1. Views on the Forestry Commission entering into joint ventures....

Yes, if the whole policy of who grows what, for whom and under what conditions is thoroughly thought through.

We need extensive forests of indigenous trees suitable for the population in general, (for recreation and competitive sport) and not only for industry, building or mining or rail use.

2. Views on allowing central authority to offer leases...

There is no harm, and a great deal of good, in leasing out land for use as a recreational resource. Conditions can be inserted in the leases as to what is or is not allowed. Firms or sporting bodies would make equally good users, and in any case should always be consulted to make sure that good use is made of the land.

3. Views on transferring leases to not-for-profit trusts and similar bodies...

This course of action follows on from the preceeding paragraph, and Her Majesty's ministers are at liberty to stipulate conditions as they think important.

4. Other actions needed to be taken...

Here lies the rub. There is a growing requirement for land for recreational use. There is also a growing demand that the planting of exotic species be eliminated as much as possible. Great areas of forestry were stripped out in the past, to provide for industrial and domestic firewood and building. Anyone reading descriptions of the countryside of Scotland in the Late Mediaeval or Industrial Revolution times, will appreciate the desolation of the countryside that resulted. We do not need to return to the conditions of those days, but also there is a need to replace those forests with natural woodlands adapted to the climate existing in the United Kingdom of to-day, and being capable of being used by the peoples of to-day and to-morrow.

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