

and that the Government honours its international obligations to conservation.

Assuming that the enquiry inspector does not create a precedent by totally ignoring the policies of a structure plan, there now appear to be only two ways in which the interests of conservation could be sacrificed to short term economic interests. First, if the Secretary of State for the Environment does not accept the relevant protective policies of the draft plan, he will require them to be written out of the draft, thus removing the planning authorities' justification for refusing permission; and second, if it is found that planning permission is not required the developer will in any case be able to go ahead with the proposed scheme. Were this to happen, it can only be hoped that the County Council will live up to its promises and pressurise MAFF to withhold grant-aid.

Corby closures MARK JULY

The Northamptonshire town of Corby has been a centre for the steel industry since the 1930s, undergoing a rapid increase in the scale of operations with the post war development of an integrated iron and steel works based on local ironstone. Following Corby's designation as a New Town in the 1950s the population grew rapidly and, until recently, almost half of the working population was employed by the steel industry. The social implications of the closure of the British Steel Corporation's steel manufacturing plant at Corby are therefore considerable and the environmental impact may also be far reaching, with an accelerated change in land-use in the Rockingham Forest area.

Although the closure of the steel plant will improve local air and water quality, thus benefiting stream invertebrates and the lichens of local parkland, more obvious gains will follow the cessation of open-cast ore mining. Rockingham Forest has a nationally important concentration of ancient woodland with many of the surviving remnants standing precariously on the lips of active quarries. The highest proportional rate of woodland clearance occurred during the period 1946 to 1972 when half the area was felled to make way for ironstone extraction.

However, the impact of the ironstone industry has not been entirely detrimental and the older gullies and deep cuttings left by extractions are themselves valuable wildlife habitats in an area of intensively managed farmland. Scrub, limestone grassland and bottom pools characterize the more interesting gullies and harbour a rich flora and many rare beetles. The quarries also constitute the largest and most important exposures of Jurassic rocks in the East Midlands, and some are extensively used for educational purposes.

The Northamptonshire Structure Plan emphasizes the County Council's commitment to the restoration and agricultural reclamation of mineral extraction sites, and with the final exit of the BSC, proposals for waste disposal at these sites are in the pipeline. The Nature Conservancy Council has undertaken a rapid collation of existing information and is identifying sites of scientific importance to be notified to the planning department.

One important consideration is whether or not British Steel will now give up existing planning permission for mineral extraction on 9000 hectares of land. If they do then Bedford Purlieus, a Grade 1 site, and many other important woodlands will at least be spared the threat of destruction by mining. However, it seems likely that BSC will retain its mineral rights.

Two per cent of the land area of Rockingham Forest is semi-natural woodland, most of this being derelict coppice which has remained undisturbed since the war as owner investment has been effectively discouraged by the threat of possible ironstone quarrying. Commercial conifer stands presently account for all but nineteen per cent of the remaining 3388 ha. of primary woodland. If economic incentives continue to encourage the use of softwood species, then the ancient native woodland saved from the axe of the steel industry may well be lost to agricultural improvement and modern forestry.