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SCOTTISH OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

Please copy to NO a b/f with  
other pps for meeting.

2/15/71

PRIME MINISTER

AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION

I have seen Patrick Jenkin's minute of 30 November and Peter Rees' of 21 December and Michael Jopling's of 9 January.

I agree with Patrick and Michael that it is of the first importance to maintain the voluntary approach and that radical options such as a major extension of planning controls should be avoided. There is also a particular Scottish dimension to these questions. The paper proceeds from the popularly held view that much in current agricultural practice is damaging to landscape and conservation. There may be force in this so far as large areas of the lowlands are concerned but I would dispute that it is generally true of Scotland. Although the environmental and conservation pressure groups continue to level criticism at us they are in my view often motivated by a desire not to be outdone by their southern counterparts. The traditional pastoral agriculture that predominates in the Scottish hills and uplands - the less favoured areas constitute 75% of the land area of Scotland - poses little threat to nature conservation and none at all to the landscape and is, indeed, in many places a necessary condition for the survival of that which is most worthy of conserving. It is also in the hills and uplands that the assistance provided by grants is of greater importance for the continuing viability not only of agriculture but of whole communities. For all those reasons I would be strongly opposed to any suggestion that agricultural grants in those areas should either be further reduced for conservation reasons or that compensation for activities foregone in the interests of conservation or landscape should automatically exclude the value of grant.

Subject to those points I am broadly content with the specific proposals in Patrick Jenkin's minute. Insofar as they concern Scotland, I accept that the Financial Guidelines might usefully be reviewed. I also agree that we should not contemplate any major extension of existing planning controls over agriculture,

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particularly since this would have considerable financial implications in Scotland, especially for planning authorities, where all agricultural buildings are in general free from such controls whereas development control is applied to large buildings in England and Wales. We have not seen a need to make any Special Development Orders imposing additional controls in sensitive areas in Scotland, and I would, therefore, want to consider carefully the case for any further planning restrictions on these lines. We might also explore further the proposals for landscape conservation orders and making permanent the existing nature conservation orders but without any commitment to legislation, which would undoubtedly be controversial. I have however no evidence of any need for the former in Scotland and their introduction would in any event involve additional compensation as well as added administrative responsibilities and costs for local authorities.

I have some sympathy with Michael's concern over the number of SSSIs - the continuing creation of SSSIs in parts of Scotland where the proportion of the land so designated has already reached 15% is causing public disquiet in areas where the opportunities for economic development are in any event limited.

I am copying this to members of "H", to Sir Geoffrey Howe, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

GY.

GY

Scottish Office  
17 January 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

You read these papers last  
weekend, except for the  
minutes from Mr Younger  
(flag E) and Mr Edwards  
(flag F) which arrived  
subsequently.

DMS  
22/.