



RESTRUCTURING FOR GROWTH

CHANGES in the balance of our business have prompted a thorough reorganisation of Tilhill's structure during 1990.

Increasing growth of the landscaping business demanded more thoroughgoing specialisation, in recognition of the different emphasis and requirements of that essentially construction-based operation.

The former Landscaping Division became a separate company, with its own head office at Chesham, Bucks; this became effective on January 1, as reported in *Tree Scribe* 27.

For the forestry business, a fundamental review of accounting systems updating requirements pointed to a new system greatly devolved to the branches. This will require fewer staff at the centre, in part because of the departure of landscaping and in part due to this devolution and the greater power of the new systems.

This, together with the need for best use of capital, prompted a decision to relocate our administrative centre and sell Greenhills House and surrounds.

Greenhills near Farnham has been Tilhill's headquarters for almost 40 years, so this decision was not taken lightly, nor was the decision to move the accounting function and overall operating headquarters to the company's offices at Sauchie-



● Tilhill Forestry's picturesque and historic headquarters at Old Sauchie near Stirling.

burn near Stirling. It was, however, apparent that this would have positive results, given the balance of the company's business net of landscaping and the changes in operational structures made necessary by the new operating climate for forestry and made possible by latest communications technology.

Tilhill's parent, Booker, has

encouraged, and is greatly supporting, the company during this period of change.

Pre-eminently, our forestry business requires the focus and direction that can be given by one director full-time in charge of promotion, marketing and development. Martin Wilkinson assumed this new role on November 1, as Business Development Director; he

is complemented by David Gittins, continuing in his specialised role as Investment Marketing Director.

The two operating divisions, Scottish and Southern, are amalgamating into one Forestry Operations Division, under A. F. Macpherson as Forestry Operations Director; he is supported by Andrew Binmore as Director, Southern Operations, with specific responsibility for branches located in the south.

The nursery, as ever, remains at Grange Road, Tilford, adjacent to Greenhills, and the Southern Central branch and Southern Operations HQ remain adjacent.

The former full-time operational area managers in north and south are now full-time branch managers, retaining several wider responsibilities.

C. P. Johnson, who has been a non-executive director of Tilhill since Booker purchased the company in 1984, is assuming the role of Executive Chairman; he is also chairman of Booker Farming and Tilhill Landscaping.

As a result of all these changes, overhead costs are already being substantially reduced, and communications within Tilhill and marketing of our services outside will be enhanced.

Not only will Tilhill's return on capital substantially improve; better communications and support from the centre to the branches will result in maintained and improved quality of service to our clients in the most cost-effective way possible.

Tribute must be paid to the loyalty and continuing effectiveness of the Accounts Department at Greenhills, who are staying in place completing the 1990 accounting year using the previous systems, despite, in most cases, facing redundancy at the end of the year.

The commitment and dedication of the outgoing Financial Director Robin Collet, and of all his team, is vital and noteworthy, and appreciated by all of their colleagues.

● New Finance Director — see page 7.

Landmark agreement

A UNIQUE partnership has been forged between Tilhill and the country's leading body of farmers and growers.

Agreement between the National Farmers' Union and Tilhill breaks new ground in offering a range of special services designed to help farmers maximise the potential of their land.

The NFU Tilhill Farm Woodland Service will guide farmers through the complexities of the three major grant schemes introduced by the Government over the past two years with the aim of encouraging farmers to plant more trees.

The NFU has a long history of looking after farmers' interests. Its strength stems from the size and spread of its 110,000 membership in England and Wales and an unrivalled record of lobbying activities on all matters relating to agriculture and horticulture.

From its early beginnings, it has offered its members a range of specialist professional advice and this new service, in collaboration with Tilhill, is an important addition.

The NFU's choice of Tilhill for this unique service reflects this company's own distinguished background in providing forestry services to farmers, estate owners and investors in forestry since our formation in 1948. Now part of Booker plc UK Agribusiness Division, Tilhill is the foremost company of its kind in Britain, providing a comprehensive woodland management service and running one of the largest private forest-tree nurseries in Europe.

Its tradition of quality of service, provided from a network of 18 locations throughout the UK staffed by more than 60 professional or technically trained foresters, ensures that NFU farmers and growers in all parts of the country will be able to benefit from the best possible advice.

It is estimated that 280,000 hectares of woodland exist on farms — at an average of four hectares per farm. Since the introduction of the Farm Woodland Scheme in 1988, the area of woodland planted under the scheme has been more than 4,500 hectares, at an average of 6.5 hectares per farm involved.

Well-managed woodland combines a range of benefits, not just in terms of a more attractive countryside, but also an improvement in the capital value of farms. It also opens up new business opportunities — timber production, sporting activities, landscape and wildlife, as well as providing shelter.

NFU members can choose from a menu of services offered by the Farm Woodland Service ranging from an initial appraisal for newcomers to the scheme right through to a continuing management service for established plantations, contract work and harvesting and marketing.

The new service will be kept under constant review by both Tilhill and the NFU but it's clear from the outset that the scheme has enormous potential both for the NFU in continuing to fight for its members' interests and for Tilhill by increasing the variety of its customer base and widening the range of its services.



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A NEW FORCE IN THE INDUSTRY



The Tilhill board. Back row, from left, Andrew Miller, commercial and products director; Sandy Macpherson, forestry director; David Hadden, finance director. Front row, Len Yull, Highland regional director; Peter Johnson, chairman; Martin Wilkinson, operations director.

A message from the Chairman

The national budget of 1988 has proved to be a watershed in forestry policy in the United Kingdom. It has also led indirectly to the formation of Tilhill Economic Forestry. The two oldest and most reputable names in private forest management and nursery production have merged to form a new force in the industry. The merger has been promoted with the substantial backing of Booker plc and the valuable guidance of the members of the Booker Countryside board, whose work will increasingly be in evidence.

The early weeks of the merger were necessarily preoccupied with the restructuring and relocation of facilities. More than a hundred professional forest staff now operate in two dozen forestry districts, giving nationwide coverage – a source of forestry skills unparalleled in the private sector. The nurseries of the merged company are well equipped and able to meet a wide species range with the highest quality of service. The forest survey department gives us and our clients a competitive advantage with its latest technology and, in the acknowledged excellence of our wildlife and habitat skills, we have the comfort of knowing we are doing admirable conservation.

However important the merger has been internally, it has of itself changed nothing on a national policy basis. Misunderstandings of the contribution and value of plantation forestry remain widespread, as does real knowledge of what motivates the amenity and restorative planter. The board of Tilhill Economic Forestry will be playing its part in influencing attitudes, and we must now all have the confidence to speak up for forestry and back it up at local level through sensitive work and a willingness to put over the case to the unconverted.

Our clients are facing change and living in the same rather depressed economic scene. They will expect the most cost-effective quality service which can be provided. It must be innovative and dependable rather than rigid and repetitive so that, as managers, we can maximise the returns they value most without losing the essential ingredient of personal contact. We will always be expected to be competitive. The

senior management of this new company looks forward to the challenge of these changes and is determined to provide the leadership so that our products, service and standing will set the pace for the next decade.

Tree Scribe invited the former Nature Conservancy Council chairman Sir William Wilkinson to outline the relationship between the interests of conservation and those of coniferous and semi-coniferous forestry. His article is on the back page.

We welcome his contribution, and are pleased to note that there is much common ground. However Tilhill Economic Forestry, as well as the Government, is looking for a significant increase in new planting over current depressed levels. With current land values, it is unrealistic to expect more than a modest portion of the new planting to come from lowland forestry on former arable and enclosed pasture. Expansion of upland afforestation will be necessary. The successful and innovative forest products industry requires a reliable long-term supply of raw material, and the landward areas of Britain require the consequent inputs to the local economy.

We are in agreement that responsible forestry does not seek to plant bogs and mires and the high hills; but responsible forestry does want to be down the hill as well as off the hill. Carefully designed afforestation of degraded sheepwalk, ecologically impoverished by centuries of overgrazing means change, rather than loss, for nature conservation. Down the hill afforestation can avoid the most important upland wildlife sites and, well-designed, creates valuable new habitat.