RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FORESTRY AND LAND MANAGEMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM BIDWELLS

Bidwells is a long established (1840) partnership, operating its property consultancy business through much of eastern England, and all of Scotland.

In Scotland, we have been established for 30 years, and currently manage on behalf of a wide range of clients in the order of 400,000 hectares (1 million acres) of land.

Forestry consultancy and management is a very important part of our Scottish business.

We have taken part in discussions on the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill, and have helped form the detailed responses to this which have been put forward by Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) and Confor. Having done this, we would like to add our support to the points made by those organisations.

In particular, we wish to emphasise our disquiet over the proposals to strengthen and broaden Scottish Ministers powers of Compulsory Purchase, and question the desirability and/or need for them to be included within the proposed legislation. We believe it is important that the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill should look to update, simplify, improve and clarify the legislation it intends to replace, and given that we are unaware of many (if any) examples of where the Scottish Ministers have exercised their existing compulsory purchase powers in the forestry context, we question the need to continue, and indeed strengthen them to include other than forestry land.

There is an important issue of investor confidence which we would urge the Committee to consider, this being that, as advisors, we would find it difficult to explain to, for example, the trustees of a pension fund looking to invest in Scottish forestry, that there could be a risk, no matter how small of their property being compulsorily acquired.

We would also wish to emphasise the points raised in the responses regarding the possibility of (unspecified) charges being raised for (unspecified) granting of permissions. We feel this would be an unhelpful and unwelcome step, should such charges be considered for gaining necessary forestry permissions such as felling approvals, EIA’s, Forest Plans, prior notification for roads etc.

We do, however, welcome the generally positive tone which is set in the Bill towards encouraging the development of the forest industry in Scotland.

Bidwells
August 2017