

Time to move the debate on



In his 2011 New Year message to customers and packaging colleagues, Clive Bowers, Chairman of the CPI Corrugated Sector and CEO of Smurfit Kappa UK, says the packaging community should grasp the opportunity to convince the new government that packaging is part of the solution, not part of the problem and recognise its role in achieving a low carbon economy.

2010 saw the arrival of a parliament with 227 new MPs, a turnover of 35%. This presents us with an opportunity for fresh thinking on many fronts including the importance of packaging and UK manufacturing in general.

Let's start with the vital role packaging can play in protecting goods in a consumer society demanding more and more choice and instant availability. Rather than being fixated on the need to reduce the amount of packaging, we argue that the relevant authorities should turn their attention to the issue of food waste that has ten times the environmental impact of packaging. Packaging minimises waste and damage and it would be counterproductive to reduce packaging only to find that more waste ensues.

As far as the corrugated packaging industry is concerned, we are very proud of our environmental credentials and these are manifested in a number of ways. First, a well-designed corrugated pack can take carbon out of the supply chain. For example, being able to fill lorries to the brim means fewer lorry journeys overall. Second, we have already overshot the government's environmental targets. More than 80% of corrugated packaging is recycled in the UK and, on average, 76% of every corrugated box consists of recycled fibres. When we do have to bring virgin fibre into the production mix, it commonly comes from small dimension timber and forest thinnings from managed and certified forests – a renewable, sustainable crop. If we look at the wider picture, in the period 2006-2009, corrugated packaging in Europe has, on average, reduced its carbon footprint by 12%, beating the 10% target currently being called for by Courtauld Commitment 2.

When we met MPs at our recent lobby event in the House of Commons, we saw a clear recognition that corrugated packaging is playing its full part in the transition to a low carbon economy. Dan Rogerson MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Packaging, said that corrugated packaging is "a sector of industry that takes material that people have already used, and turns it back into an incredibly useful product. We need to get as many MPs as possible into corrugated factories to see the good work that's going on."

We need to see a manufacturing renaissance in the UK and we should not accept that decline is inevitable. Given the right conditions, manufacturing of all kinds, not just high-tech, should be able to operate profitably in the UK. New attitudes in the workforce, combined with new technologies, skills and knowledge, means that UK manufacturing can compete internationally on quality, service and price.

There is an important role for Government to provide more encouragement to home-grown entrepreneurs to start manufacturing businesses; to make it easier for existing manufacturers to do business in the UK; and to increase the amount of effort being put in to attract overseas investors.

So there's a lot of work to do in many important areas. Now is the time to move the debate on, as we influence the policy issues that will determine the UK's self-sufficiency in packaging, recycling and papermaking.

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Notes to Editors

- For additional information on the UK paper industry, in the first instance, please contact Emma Punchard, Head of Communications on 01793 889609 or email epunchard@paper.org.uk. Alternatively, please visit: <http://www.paper.org.uk>.
- CPI is the voice of the paper industry in the UK, representing papermakers, tissue manufacturers, corrugated packaging producers and recovered paper merchants.
- Corrugated packaging is a versatile material used with a very wide range of food, grocery and manufactured products from light bulbs to engine blocks.
- An unsurpassed level of flexibility and efficiency means that it can be readily tailored to suit the rapidly changing demands of the supply chain.
- A superb environmental record, with its raw materials coming from a sustainable resource, and an impressive recycling rate that saves an area of board the size of Greater London from landfill every four months.