

Composites UK Parliamentary Reception – 2nd May 2023

Speech prepared by Alan Banks (Chairman) and David Bailey (CEO)

The UK composites industry is world class and world leading. Borne out of our heritage in top end global motorsport and our knowledge in the aerospace industry, Britain is rightly regarded in terms of industrial expertise, intellectual property, and research within the composites industry.

The opportunity and growth of the UK composites industry is intrinsically linked to the UK's commitment to a net zero future. Put simply, without the composites industry, the UK's new zero goals will be impossible to realise.

Composites have a direct influence on all aspects of the ten-point plan to decarbonise the UK. Advanced offshore wind, low carbon hydrogen, advanced nuclear power, zero emission vehicles, green transport, jet zero, green buildings, carbon capture, green finance and innovation as well as protecting our natural environment will all be reliant on composite materials in one form or another to realise these goals. And encouraging growth in these sectors is simply necessary to keep the UK at the forefront of these technologies.

The composites industry in the UK is worth **£10.72bn** and employs **47,500** people in 2022 – this is a decline from 2020 due to the impact that covid had for the auto and the aero industries but it is worth noting that the contribution per employee is over **£225k**. This is by far the largest employee contribution – almost double the contribution from the plastic industry despite the plastic industry being three times the size.

In the UK, there are **1,224** companies currently trading in composite materials and they predominantly operate cross-sectorially to provide the greatest benefit to UK PLC. When you think of composites, perhaps you make the mental leap to carbon fibre and high-end motorsport. But this, whilst being an exciting and captivating industry, does not show the bigger picture. We are fortunate in the UK to be building a strong renewable energy industry that relies more on glass fibre than carbon. The work undertaken in the UK in this area is simply world class and the positives that we can take as an industry can breed success if we develop and promote these successes in the right way.

As well as this, our sustainability credentials are better than you could imagine. The inherent value in composite materials at end of life are such that recovering fibre for reuse and repurposing is something that Composites UK have taken as seriously as the development of the materials themselves. We are leading and supporting many different workstreams to ensure that our sustainability credentials are as strong as our net zero objectives. We are actively working on at least three projects that are aimed at up-cycling composite materials at end of life and are working with the British Standards Institute to get these reclamation processes – designed and developed with IP in the UK – recognised internationally. By the use of **Thermo-Cyclic Pressolysis**, with IP developed right here in the UK, we are able to recover fibres in short and long condition and are working with our partners in the resin industry to recover and re-use the polymers that can also be recovered – without the use of energy intensive processes or hazardous chemicals.

We are pro-active and a very forward-thinking industry. We perfectly understand the pressures on the world stage to decarbonise and reverse the effects of global warming for future generations. What we want to convey to our governmental leaders from all part is that decarbonising the UK and generating growth are not mutually exclusive. There is compelling evidence, just in the automotive sector alone, that onshoring carbon fibre production, would reduce global emissions by **2.4m tonnes** whilst creating

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nearly **600** jobs and generating **£0.5bn of GVA**. These success stories are the heart of how we can help grow UKPLC into a world class centre for global R&D.

As well as this, the UK's Composites Leadership Forum are a group led from industry dedicated to advising the strategy required to ensure that the collaboration and communication channels are understood and opened across the entire sector to cover all technology readiness levels to bridge academia to mass production. We are passionate about ensuring that UKPLC wins in these exciting times that innovation affords us.

Composites UK have been extremely active for our members in ensuring that we promote our worth to the UK as a whole. The message we have for our colleagues in the

- DESNZ – Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
- DSIT – Department for Science Innovation and Technology
- DEFRA – Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
- DfT – Department for Transport
- DBT – Department for Business and Trade

is remarkably simple.

There will be No Net Zero – without the UK's Composites.