

Written evidence submitted by the Paper Cup Alliance (PW0041)

September 2021

1. About the Paper Cup Alliance

- 1.1. The Paper Cup Alliance (PCA) represents the leading suppliers and manufacturers of paper tea and coffee cups in the UK and Europe today.
- 1.2. The paper cups our members manufacture and supply are 100% recyclable and are being recycled in the UK¹, with rates increasing by 16-fold since 2016 and growing - a direct result of industry action. As such, the PCA is keen to support the evidence-based policy making process by contributing to this committee's inquiry.
- 1.3. Paper cup manufacturers have come together to not only increase recycling and tackle litter, but to emphasise our products are sustainably sourced and responsibly manufactured, and are the safest, most hygienic option for on-the-go consumption.
- 1.4. The PCA supports the Government's environmental ambitions, and indeed the paper cup industry and wider supply chain has responded to calls by consumers, NGOs, and Government. Over the past few years we have undertaken appropriate measures to recover and recycle more paper cups.
- 1.5. Our members are the leading firms in the UK and European markets today, directly employing over 1,700 people across the UK and c.235,000 in the wider supply chain. PCA members manufacture for and supply to leading UK brands and high street retailers, as well as the vending market, contributing to the overall coffee retail market which has generated £22bn for the UK economy, £5bn of gross wages and a 7.9% increase in annual sales cementing two decades of UK coffee shop growth.²
- 1.6. PCA members are part of the Paper Cup Recycling and Recovery Group (PCRRG) which brings together the wider supply chain.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Paper Cup Alliance welcomes the EFRA Select Committee's inquiry on Plastic Waste and the focus on mitigating the effects of plastic pollution and plastic packaging.
- 2.2. Paper cups are predominantly paper-based products, made of at least 92% paper from virgin wood fibre, and provide safe and hygienic consumption of hot and cold beverages, offering an alternative to plastic-heavy options.
- 2.3. Our cups are sourced from sustainably managed forests, making wood fibre a naturally renewable resource and a significantly more sustainable packaging alternative to plastic products, supporting the Government's vision of eliminating plastic waste by 2042.
- 2.4. Paper cups are 100% recyclable and can be recycled in facilities here in the UK. Fibre-based paper cups have now become one of the highest valued materials on the market due to an industry led incentive programme, thus making them commercially attractive to collect and helping to fuel a growing market for second life materials and products, boosting circular economy objectives.
- 2.5. As a direct consequence of industry's intervention, 159 million cups have been recycled since 2018 as part of the National Cup Recycling Scheme (as recorded independently by VALPAK). Costa alone has collected and recycled 22.5 million paper cups in stores since 2018. Without industry involvement, it is highly unlikely this would have happened. There are now over 4,800 collection points for used cups in the UK, with over 25 waste management companies supporting collection schemes in nearly a third of local authorities – excluding those in offices and private businesses.
- 2.6. It is important to stress that all paper cups used on the UK high street can be recycled in the UK today, currently across four recycling facilities with additional spare capacity. The whole

¹ DS Smith, ACE UK in Halifax, James Cropper, and Veolia

² Centre for Economics and Business Research (figures for up to end of Dec. 2019)

coffee shop sector and its supply chain has facilitated this success, including rolling out collection schemes in London, Swansea, Cardiff, Leeds, Edinburgh and Glasgow in recent years.

- 2.7.** The PCA's preferred option for paper cup recycling remains the inclusion of paper cups in the paper waste stream so that a comprehensive solution is developed for all coated paperboard, including cups. This is not currently within the scope of core materials in Defra's plans for consistent collection. We believe this is the best long-term route for capturing and recycling cups, and experience from overseas - particularly from recycling trials in the United States and Belgium - shows that paper cups can be recycled without any additional process equipment in a standard paper mill, and without incurring additional costs or contamination issues.
- 2.8.** As part of eliminating plastic waste in the UK, the PCA believes paper cups provide a sustainable alternative; provide a fully recyclable option to help the Government achieve its ambition of working towards recyclable, reusable, or compostable packaging by 2025; and being fully recyclable in the UK, reduce the potential for exporting waste.

3. Supporting alternatives to plastic consumption without resorting to more environmentally damaging options

- 3.1.** Paper cups are predominantly paper-based products, made of at least 92% paper from virgin wood fibre. Offering a sustainable alternative to plastic, wood fibre is a naturally renewable resource, sourced from sustainably managed forests. All the wood fibre used by PCA members is grown sustainably and is sourced from sustainably managed forests using fully traceable and certified by FSC, SFI or PEFC wood fibre.
- 3.2.** This ultimately produces low carbon and sustainable packaging, whilst simultaneously providing a safe and hygienic way to consume beverages. Given the global focus on transitioning to low carbon economies, we want to take the opportunity to highlight the role wood fibre based packaging can play in achieving this, as well as assisting with the Government's circular economy ambitions.
- 3.3.** High quality wood fibre can be recycled up to seven times into different products before becoming a source for renewable energy or composting, thus further contributing to the Government's net zero ambitions.
- 3.4.** Originating from fully grown trees, for each felled tree, three new trees are planted. Through this process, all material is used appropriately, making paper cups the lowest carbon and most hygienic choice³ for drinks as confirmed by a peer-reviewed, independent 2019 Life Cycle Analysis.⁴ This report also confirms that paper cups account for only 4% of takeaway coffee's climate impact, and this carbon footprint falls by 54% when the cups are recycled.
- 3.5.** More recently, an in-depth study carried out independently by the respected European engineering company Ramboll⁵ showed reusable tableware generated 177% more CO₂e emissions than the paper-based single-use system, consumed 267% more freshwater, produced 132% more fine particulates matter, increased fossil depletion by 238% and terrestrial acidification by 72%.
- 3.6.** Made from renewable resources, paper-based products also have carbon capture and storage benefits. Indeed, sustainably managed forests in Europe mitigate 13% of European greenhouse gas emissions in line with the European Green Deal objectives.⁶ Responsible stewardship means that, in Finland alone, forests are growing by 100 million m³ a year

³ <https://www.eppa-eu.org/safety-and-hygiene/report-professor-david-mcdowell.html>

⁴ Carried out by VTT Technical Research Center of Finland Ltd

⁵ <https://www.eppa-eu.org/general/press-release-european-paper-packaging-alliance-12-january-2021.html>

⁶ European Paper Packaging Alliance

compared to the 65million m³ harvested each year for use across the forestry sector. Indeed between 2005 and 2015, European forests grew by 44,000km² – an area bigger than Switzerland, and the equivalent of over 1,500 football pitches of forest growth every day.⁷

4. Supporting the Government’s ambition that all plastic packaging placed on the market be recyclable, reusable, or compostable by 2025

- 4.1. The PCA believes paper cups are integral to achieving the Government’s ambition as they provide a recyclable option for hot and cold beverages.
- 4.2. Increasingly used to replace plastic in packaging supply chains, wood fibre-based packaging has a role to play in mitigating the use of plastic packaging.
- 4.3. Paper cups are 100% recyclable, playing a crucial role in the transition to a low carbon economy whilst boosting UK manufacturing and supporting the UK food and drink sector.
- 4.4. Our cups can be recycled in 4 facilities across the UK, subsequently being made into stationary, office supplies, café and bar ware, furniture, soap, shopping bags, and luxury paper.
- 4.5. The PCA also notes that whilst reusable cups offer an attractive alternative to single use paper cups, it is important to take a systems approach to comparisons, considering the materials used in reusable cups, the impact of re-use on carbon emissions and water consumption, and whether the reusables themselves are recyclable.
- 4.6. A recent report by Ramboll (third party reviewed by TUV) showed single use systems in an average QSR were more beneficial than an equivalent reusable system. As highlighted in 3.5 (above), reusable tableware generated 177% more CO₂-e emissions than the paper-based single-use system, consumed 267% more freshwater, produced 132% more fine particulates matter, increased fossil depletion by 238% and terrestrial acidification by 72%.⁸

5. Ensuring plastic waste is not exported and then managed unsustainably

- 5.1. The PCA’s preferred option for paper cup recycling, which is not currently within scope of core materials in Defra’s plans for consistent collection, is for the inclusion of paper cups in the paper waste stream. This would ensure that a comprehensive solution is developed for all coated paperboard, including cups. With greater consistency in recycling and collections of paper cups across the UK, we can ensure more of this material is captured and recycled.
- 5.2. Experience from overseas, particularly from recycling trials in the United States and Belgium, shows that paper cups can be recycled without any additional process equipment in a standard paper mill, and without additional costs or contamination issues.
- 5.3. In the US, supply chain partners Sustana, Westrock, Seda and Starbucks joined forces to demonstrate that coffee cups can be successfully recycled back into a coffee cup. This resulted in 25 million old Starbucks cups being recycled into new Starbucks cups, with the cost of recycling and contamination proving not to be an issue.
- 5.4. In Belgium, PCA member Stora Enso’s Langerbrugge mill, one of the largest paper mills in Europe - which produces 540,000 tonnes of recycled newsprint and magazine papers annually - conducted a recycling trial demonstrating that paper cups can be recycled without any additional process equipment in a standard paper mill.
- 5.5. If paper cups were included in the normal paper and card recycling stream this would boost circular economy objectives, with UK produced materials remaining in the UK to be turned into second life products.
- 5.6. As UK recycling facilities have the capacity to recycle all the paper cups used on UK high streets, we should focus on ensuring the best means of collecting these cups so that they can be recycled here in the UK, and so growing the second life market further.

⁷ <https://www.twosides.info/UK/european-forests-are-growing-by-over-1500-football-pitches-every-day/>

⁸ <https://www.eppa-eu.org/general/press-release-european-paper-packaging-alliance-12-january-2021.html>