

UK to lead global innovation in sustainable plastics in drive to net zero

- Businesses back Government Industrial Strategy challenge to cut plastics pollution with an expected £149m investment from the private sector
- Funding could be used to find ways to cut waste in the supply-chain and create new sustainable recyclable materials
- Announcement is part of biggest boost to R&D in UK history through the Government's modern Industrial Strategy

New forms of packaging and plastic made from plants, wood chippings and food waste could be a step closer, thanks to new business and Government investment.

Businesses are expected to jointly invest up to £149m, alongside a £60m Government investment, to help fight the global battle against single use plastics.

Funding could be used to find ways to cut waste in the supply chain, develop new business models and create new sustainable recyclable materials.

This could include using plants instead of oils to make plastic, which will help reduce their carbon impact.

This forms part of the Government's Clean Growth Challenge – a key part of the modern Industrial Strategy – and follows the UK becoming the first major economy to legislate to end its contribution to global warming by 2050.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

We have all seen the enormous damage being caused by single-use plastics across the world. The race is on to develop new effective and practical solutions to end the scourge of single use plastics, helping protect our planet for future generations.

We have put a record level of research and development investment at the heart of our Industrial Strategy – investing to support our best minds and businesses in developing the solutions and industries of tomorrow.

This government and business co-investment clearly demonstrates that when it comes to cutting plastics pollution there is a shared

ambition. This is a unique opportunity for our world-leading businesses and innovators to develop the materials of the future with the potential to transform our economy as well as our environment.

Around 80 million tonnes of plastic packaging is produced annually and if left unchecked, this is expected to triple by 2050. After a short first-use cycle, 95% of plastic packaging is lost to the economy.

Brands are increasingly acting on the need to shift away from single use plastics. Sainsbury's has committed to removing 10,000 tonnes this year as well as removing plastic bags from fresh fruit and vegetables and introducing water refill stands in superstores. Today the supermarket chain has announced the removal of all plastic bags for loose fruit and vegetables in Lincoln and Kidlington stores.

Judith Batchelar Director of Sainsbury's Brand:

The plastics challenge is one of the greatest issues for our planet, so today's announcement is fantastic news for retailers like Sainsbury's that are already committed to reducing single-use plastics.

But this is an issue that affect all retailers and manufacturers so it's only by working together that we can make genuine progress and significantly reduce the nation's reliance on plastic. This fund will act as a catalyst for this "coalition of the willing" to address the research and innovation opportunities together and Sainsbury's is proud to play our part.

Investment through the Government's modern Industrial Strategy is already backing the development of plastics made from plants, and products that degrade easily in an open environment.

Companies behind these innovations include London-based start-up Skipping Rocks Lab, who have created new packaging made from Notpla, a material made from seaweed and plants that only lasts as long as it needs to. This material was used in a trial by Just Eat for their condiments and used as an alternative to plastic bottles at the London Marathon 2019.

As part of this wider focus, the Government today published a call for evidence on standards for these types of materials, known as bio-based and biodegradable plastics. It seeks evidence from scientists, manufacturers and the research community, on the sustainability and wider impacts of biodegradable, compostable, and bio-based plastics and asks whether new and improved standards and labelling for these materials would be valuable.

UK Research and Innovation Chief Executive, Professor Sir Mark Walport said:

Plastic pollution is a global crisis that affects our oceans and our land. The new investment through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund will establish the UK as a leading innovator in smart and sustainable plastic packaging solutions, delivering cleaner growth across the supply chain, with a dramatic reduction in plastic waste entering the environment by 2025.

Unilever Chief R&D Officer Richard Slater said:

Unilever is actively working to reduce the impact of its plastic packaging. Many of the key challenges we face can only be overcome by working in partnership and across the whole system. It's great to see industry and government coming together to find innovative solutions – as part of the 'Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging challenge'.

Today's announcement is part of the Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging challenge, through Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, delivered by UK Research and Innovation. It builds on the UK Bioeconomy Strategy and Government's Resources and Waste Strategy which sets out its plans to overhaul the waste system, cut plastic pollution, and move towards a more circular economy.

The Industrial Strategy sets out how the whole of the UK can build on its strengths, extend them into the future, and capitalise on new opportunities. Investing in science and research to keep us at the forefront of new technologies and the benefits they bring, including through meeting the Clean Growth Grand Challenge.