MPKGS Chairs Report October 2026

I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on the state of our industry and the significant changes that have shaped UK packaging throughout 2026.

If 2025 was a year of preparing for change, then 2026 has been a year of putting that preparation into practice. Across the packaging value chain, businesses are navigating new legislation, evolving sustainability expectations, increasing cost pressures and changing customer demands. At the same time, these challenges are creating opportunities for innovation, collaboration and a fundamental rethink of how we design, manufacture, use and recover packaging.

Packaging remains essential to protecting products, reducing damage and waste, maintaining product quality and enabling efficient supply chains. However, the question we increasingly face is not simply whether packaging does its job, but whether it does that job in the most resource-efficient, commercially viable and environmentally responsible way possible.

In an industry experiencing so much change, the value of the Midlands Packaging Society is more important than ever. We bring together a fantastic mix of people from across the packaging industry, each bringing their own experience, knowledge and expertise. The collective knowledge within our membership and committee is invaluable, and by creating opportunities to connect, share experiences and learn from one another, we can help our industry navigate change, develop skills and build for the future.

I want to just touch on some key headlines which I believe have been and are shaping our world of packaging, firstly:

1. The Regulatory Landscape – Shifting from Ambition to Accountability
One of the biggest developments this year has been the continued evolution of packaging regulation.

Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, is increasingly linking packaging design with financial cost. Recyclability-based fee modulation is encouraging businesses to review their packaging formats and materials, although I believe it is still early days.

The RAM (Recycling Assessment Methodology) is also evolving, and the industry is learning as the criteria develop. However, concerns remain around packaging receiving a red rating because a format has not been validated, rather than necessarily because it cannot be recycled. This risks restricting progress and innovation.

Much of the immediate focus is understandably on collecting and reporting packaging data, but we must ensure technical development doesn't take a back seat. We need to move beyond compliance and embed design for recyclability from the start of product development, investing in the technical expertise and training needed to make informed decisions.

We've also seen mandatory household collections for plastic films / flexibles delayed until 2030 under Simpler Recycling, while the EU PPWR began applying in August 2026, with further requirements being phased in.

Ultimately, accurate data is essential, but we need the skills and technical knowledge to turn that data into better packaging decisions. This is an area where our Society can help by encouraging knowledge sharing and technical development.

2. Sustainability - looking at the bigger picture
Sustainability remains one of the defining forces shaping our industry, but the conversation is becoming more sophisticated.

For many years, the focus was on reducing packaging weight, switching materials or increasing the proportion of recycled content. These remain important considerations aligned with the new regulations, but there is now greater recognition that packaging must be assessed across its entire life cycle.

A lightweight pack is not automatically the most sustainable option if it compromises product protection or increases food and product waste. Equally, packaging made from recycled material may still present challenges if it cannot be efficiently collected, sorted or reprocessed at the end of its life.

The industry therefore needs to consider the complete picture: material use, product protection, transport efficiency, recyclability, recycled content, carbon impact and the availability of appropriate waste infrastructure. Fundamentally, back to how we (as technical experts) used to design and develop packaging.

The opportunity for our industry is to move beyond individual sustainability claims and focus on measurable improvements across the entire packaging life cycle.

3. Customers and Consumer Behaviour – Expectations Are Evolving
Consumer expectations continue to evolve, with growing awareness of recycling and environmental impact. However, price, convenience, product quality and ease of use remain just as important. Greenwashing messages and alignment with the Empco and Green Claims Code are starting to help support clarity for customers but I feel this is still some way off the education piece which is really needed to bring to life the real impacts and the what and the why.

This means sustainable packaging must work in practice, not just look good on paper. Clear disposal instructions, credible environmental claims and packaging that consumers can easily use and recycle will all be increasingly important.

Ultimately, successful packaging needs to work for the manufacturer, the retailer, the consumer and the recycling system.

4.Commercial Pressures, Innovation and Skills
Businesses continue to balance material and energy costs, investment in new technology, supply chain pressures and the cost of regulatory compliance.

At the same time, automation, artificial intelligence, improved recycling technologies and better packaging data offer opportunities to improve efficiency and make more informed decisions.

However, technology alone isn't enough. We also need the right skills, knowledge and collaboration across the industry to turn these opportunities into practical solutions.

Looking ahead - The Value of our Society.
With so much change taking place, the Midlands Packaging Society has an important role to play. Our strength lies in the experience and expertise of our committee and members, bringing together different materials, technologies and perspectives from across the packaging value chain.

Through our Pack to the Future conference, webinars, site visits and networking, we create opportunities to share knowledge, challenge thinking and build relationships.

Looking ahead to 2027, I want us to build on these foundations, ensuring we remain visible, up to date and relevant, with events that support professional development and help members navigate the challenges ahead. I will leave our financial position to the Treasurer's report but its great to confirm that we continue to grow our 'pot' and have continued to grow our funds to help support the growth of the society and our objectives.

To conclude, although the growing focus on packaging is being driven partly by the financial burden of regulation, it presents an opportunity to improve recyclability, encourage innovation and turn compliance into meaningful progress.

I would like to thank our committee for their time and commitment, our members for their continued support, along with our growing supporters or sponsors. The strength of our Society lies in its people and their willingness to share knowledge and help others succeed. That is something we should be proud of and continue to build on.

Thank you for your continued support. I look forward to what we can achieve together in 2027.

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Vice Chair
Midlands Packaging Society

29/10/2026