



SUSTAINABLE AND COST EFFECTIVE

A 'green' approach has been an integral part of Finnish Fibreboard's philosophy for years. Based in forest-rich Finland, the company utilises timber processing waste as its raw material, producing hardboard of the highest standard. Romana Moares spoke to Peter Jones, managing director of Finnish Fibreboard UK, about what makes the company unique and how it plans to make use of new opportunities in light of hardboards increasingly replacing plywood and other traditional products.



Hardboard has been produced on Finnish Fibreboard's Heinola site in Finland since 1949, although the company's history dates back to 1931. Over the years, the production techniques, products and end uses have changed considerably, but the basic principles of hardboard have remained the same. As Finnish Fibreboard's hardboard is produced from the by-products of other wood processing industries with virtually no additives, its LION branded products retain, and often improve, the properties of the raw timber used.

The privately owned company has expanded steadily as a result of mergers as well as organic growth. "Our heritage was plywood manufacturing and we have extensive knowledge of and experience in the wood panel sector," says Peter Jones. "Today, we differ from our competitors in a number of ways. We believe that we are unique as we don't cut down trees and process logs to make our boards but use only the by-product from the wood-processing industry to make our LION branded products. This makes our business model quite exceptional in terms of sustainability." He further explains that just as in the beginning when the company used to share a site with its plywood operation and process its waste into hardboard products, the company still stays close to its raw material source and most of the materials today still come from two of its shareholders, which helps not only in ensuring ongoing continuity of supply, but also in maintaining as small a carbon footprint as possible.

LION Board

The environmental friendliness of the company's production process has been continuously improved since it was founded. The business,

employing only about 85 people, is located in a single factory with two highly automated production lines. Locally sourced bio-fuel (wood) is used to generate most of the energy necessary for production and its painting line was refurbished in recent years to enable it to efficiently use water-based paints and achieve a superior finish. There has also been a process of continuous reduction in the levels of wastewater effluents, culminating in the recent decision to invest in a state of the art evaporation plant as the final part of the wastewater treatment system. The final process residue is burnt at the power generation plant.

"Did you know that hardboard is the densest timber based panel produced?" asks Peter Jones. "As we at FinFib don't use any harmful chemicals or resins (many of our products use only the natural lignin found within the wood as a bonding agent), it is easy and safe to work with – and it doesn't have that horrible formaldehyde smell often associated with most other wood based panels. The lack of chemicals in the production process is another of our unique features."

The company's flagship is its LION Board™ brand, currently the biggest-selling hardboard brand in the European market. "Our products are extremely versatile, and are supplied to numerous sectors, from automotive and steel producers through to the packaging sector, construction, furniture manufacturers and as an underlay for flooring," the managing director explains.

Meeting new standards

Recently, the company has launched three new product lines: LION Protect™ for the flooring, construction and packaging sectors; LION Floor™ for the flooring sector; and LION HD Panel Board™ for con-



struction, temporary buildings, refurbishment and shop fitting. “We are continually striving to improve the performance characteristics of our existing products and looking at ways to improve their performance. Additionally we are developing products that can deliver added value to our customer base as well as to their customers of course,” says Peter Jones.

“It is the end-customer who drives our product development process – we always endeavour to develop products that satisfy an existing requirement or that will resolve an existing problem with another product. For example, customers using plywood for resilient flooring underlay were having many problems with core gaps, veneer overlaps or knots, which contributed to a large number of flooring failures. As we produce a homogenous engineered board, our product is grain-less, knotless, doesn’t split, crack or splinter and obviously guarantees not to have these plywood issues, and thus offers a viable and economical solution to this problem,” he points out.

The company is now focusing on promoting the fact that LION Floor™ fully meets the new British BS8203:2017 standard for resilient flooring underlay, put in place to eliminate problems stemming from low quality products and to increase the performance of floor coverings. “As regulations tighten up on ‘green issues’ our product will become ever more relevant for the market,” remarks the managing director.

Green by default

He further describes the advantages of LION Boards™: “As a large percentage of consequential damage to floors comes from impact damage, we are also finding that many customers are now preferring our high density LION Protect™ to their traditional twin wall polypropylene style of flooring protection, so this has also resulted in additional interest in our products. Like the Circular Economy, our product can be easily re-used time and time again and at the end of its life cycle, it can be recycled using most timber recycling facilities; because our product is biodegradable, it can be easily, economically and safely disposed of or even burnt.”

Finland, the most heavily forested country in Europe, has an extremely proactive replanting programme, making its timber sector

one of the world’s best and most sustainable economies. “Our LION Board™ brands benefit from Finland’s progressive attitude, and when you take into consideration that LION Boards™ are produced ONLY using by-products from our local wood processing industries, this makes our boards some of the most sustainable and greenest wood based panel products.”

Finland accounts for about 15 per cent of sales. Most of the remaining 85 per cent is sold to other European markets although some products are also exported to Australia and North Africa. Mr Jones stresses that the company focuses on long established distribution partnerships, providing comprehensive training to ensure that distributors are functioning just as effectively as its internal sales force. The company’s largest suppliers are two of its shareholders, UPM and Versowood.

He points out that demand for these eco-friendly, durable and resistant boards is expected to increase, not least as a result of the trend to replace less sustainable products such as some plywoods or plastics. “Hardboard, although a very old product, has more relevance in today’s world than it did when it was first invented in the 1920s. It is a product which is ‘green’ by default rather than by design. In today’s market, which is finally coming to appreciate the values of sustainability and continuity of supply, Finnish Fibreboard, and our LION branded boards, are once again coming back into fashion. We have a good, sustainable business model which will carry us into the future.” □

