Leaders from the UK’s biomass heat industry have called on the Chancellor for urgent support ahead of the Spring Budget to help Government meet heat decarbonisation targets, address climate change and deliver on its 30 million tree planting initiative.

Biomass heat has been one of the UK’s fastest growing sectors over recent times. However, with the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) set to close in March 2021 and no extension tabled, representatives of Biomass Heat Works! have now written and delivered a letter to new Chancellor, the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, to ask for continued funding as a matter of urgency.

Biomass, as part of the RHI, has been the most successful technology used by homes and businesses switching to renewable energy heat sources, especially in rural and off-gas grid areas. However, the sector, which employs 46,000 jobs, supports 700 supply chain companies and has reduced carbon emissions by approximately 50 million tonnes, is now at risk of falling off a cliff edge if continued Government support is not assured. Leaders have therefore called for:

- **renewable technology support, including biomass, to be part of an extended RHI until 2030;**
- **additional funding within the scheme to ensure installations are properly assessed for energy efficiency, providing consumer protection and carbon reduction assurances;**
- **the start of reductions in subsidies for fossil fuel usage in heating.**

Mark Lebus from Biomass Heat Works! and Chair of the UK Pellet Council which is delivering the campaign commented, “The biomass heat sector is fully supportive of the UK’s net zero, carbon reduction and renewable energy pledge, and given our success over the last decade in reducing carbon emissions and enabling people to switch to renewable heat, we’re perfectly positioned to carry on and deliver these commitments moving forward.”
“Biomass is the most proven and best ROI renewable technology at the Government’s disposal, especially for rural areas, and also supports the forestry management infrastructure needed to deliver the planting of 30 million trees by 2024. There is a very successful supply chain network and workable circular economy already in existence, but the uncertainty we have currently, looking beyond 2021, is stifling the industry.

“New renewable heating projects are stalling, job creation is being put on hold, future business investments are being compromised and a highly successful sector is at risk of demise. By funding a new, extended RHI, holding onto its successes and tailoring it accordingly, this could encourage over 850,000 households and 60,000 businesses in rural areas who are currently using oil or LPG for heating, to switch.

“We’re therefore asking the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP to get behind our industry and allocate the funding required to extend the RHI, protect jobs and help the Government achieve net zero targets through effective heat decarbonisation policy.”

With support, the biomass heat industry has the potential to grow to 80,000 UK jobs by 2026 and 100,000 by 2030, whilst contributing £2bn annually to the economy.

Furthermore, should the Government begin its tree planting initiative, this, through accredited woodland management schemes, could generate an additional six million tonnes of residue for biomass use, created from thinnings and low value wood.

Neil Harrison, Chair of the Wood Heat Association added, “The current estimated annual usage is over two million tonnes of residue per annum, therefore by working hand-in-hand with the UK’s forestry sector, the biomass industry would be sustained for years to come.

“However, the critical mass that has already been built up in biomass supply chains since the RHI was first introduced back in 2011 is vital in helping the UK to start reaching its ambitious carbon reduction targets.
“For progress and momentum to be maintained, Government support for the decarbonisation of heat should remain at the core of renewable energy policy. Biomass has proved itself time and time again, and with a collaborative, joined up approach, its attendant supply chains would drive sustainable woodland establishment and management whilst creating jobs and improving landscapes.”

For more information go to www.biomassheatworks.co.uk

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Photo: Mark Lebus of Biomass Heat Works! and Chair of the UK Pellet Council delivering a letter to Treasury on behalf of the UK’s biomass heat sector.

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EDITORS NOTES:

• The UK Pellet Council (UKPC) is a trade body, hosted by the Renewable Energy Association (REA), which represents the interests of the UK wood pellet sector. Its members are manufacturers and distributors of wood pellets for heating.

• The WHA is a wholly owned subsidiary of the REA and the UK trade association for the modern wood heating and related biomass heating industry including wood fuel suppliers, biomass boiler and stove installers and distributors, and anyone involved in the supply chain.

• The REA is the UK’s largest trade association for renewable energy and clean technologies with around 550 members operating across heat, transport, and power.

• Approximately 18% of renewable heat was supported by the RHI in 2018 compared with 14% in 2017, with non-domestic heat generation supported by the scheme increasing by 32% (medium capacity biomass boilers accounting for 50%)