

# Meet Adaptavate, on a mission to decarbonate globally

*As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Tom Robinson, CEO and Founder of Adaptavate, about carbon-negative technologies, scientific rigour, and the construction industry.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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## What was the catalyst for launching Adaptavate?

After graduating in Geography, I travelled the world, seeking adventure in the form of waves and rocks while doing odd jobs to keep my adventure going, embracing a low impact way of living. When I came back to the UK, I started working as a builder. It was at a building site where I realised the need to innovate in the construction space.

The damp and mould problems in many buildings, the amount of plasterboard waste and the cost to dispose it of didn't seem right! So, I enrolled a Masters in Sustainable Architecture at the Centre for Alternative Technology. During my thesis, I developed what now is known as Breathaboard. I was encouraged to apply for the Climate-KIC accelerator...and the rest is history! I founded Adaptavate with the desire to reduce the carbon footprint of highly impactful construction materials and to provide healthier, carbon-negative alternatives that every builder can use anywhere in the world. This venture was aimed at rethinking and redesigning how building materials are made, putting the planetary bounds right at the centre of the global business model. Adaptavate has a

particular focus on leveraging bio-based feedstocks and reducing reliance on high-carbon, traditional materials.

## Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

*Adaptavate* is a business answering the urgent call to decarbonise construction globally. We are doing this by developing the carbon-negative technologies and products needed, and the industrial ecosystem to deploy them fast, anywhere in the world.

Our patented core technology is a platform of formulations and industrial processes to make carbon-negative and low-carbon construction products, with initial focus on the wallboard industry with our revolutionary Breathaboard. We are making our technology available to global construction product manufacturers through potential partnerships/licences to maximise our impact, addressing the climate emergency urgently and effectively with great traction.

Our products to date, Breathaboard and Breathaplasta, are also designed to breathe with the building and people within it, reducing condensation and preventing the build-up of common problems such as black mould. So not only are these products efficient and have significantly lower impact, they make our homes healthier for people to live in too.

Adaptavate collaborates with architects, builders, and environmental consultants to integrate our products into various projects from residential to commercial. The company reaches customers through a network of stockists across the UK, partnerships, and direct engagement in industry events and online platforms, educating the market about the benefits of sustainable building solutions.

## How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Since our launch in 2014, Adaptavate has evolved from a concept into a leading player in the sustainable construction materials market. Initially focused on a more sustainable alternative to plasterboard, Adaptavate has now built an awesome, industry changing team in a leading R&D centre, patented technology and unique business model to make our low-carbon and carbon-negative construction materials on carbon absorbing processes. And we have only just started!

Nowadays, we are discussing potential partnerships with the biggest construction product manufacturers so our technology for Breathaboard can be applied anywhere in the world. Our Breathaplasta product range is also growing in the UK market and you can get it from a number of national builders merchants. That was just a dream when I used to be a builder all those years ago! To have a product we have developed on the shelves at national building merchants is still pretty crazy!

## Tell us about the working culture at Adaptavate

The working culture at Adaptavate is characterised by a group of passionate and curious individuals that are motivated by something greater than 'work' - we are all endeavouring to make a global change in our industry. This is underpinned by a willingness to try things that may not always work, transparency, diversity, innovation, collaboration, and strong commitments to scientific rigour and genuine low impact solutions. The company fosters a bit of a 'maverick' approach to solving big industrial and global problems but this is balanced with scientific rigour and standards needed in a trust based, conservative industry such as construction. We emphasise employee well-being and professional

growth and our team own part of our business which has always been important to me as we grow. Basically, we come to work to 'try' to make a difference in our own way and recognise that some days can be a massive breakthrough and some days you go backwards. We support one another through this and that is important when we are all on a globally massive endeavour. It's a bit like a long expedition mindset....a series of long marathons...but we are most definitely getting there!

This culture is one that comes straight from my heart as a 'recovering dirtbag'. Before launching Adaptavate, I was inspired by Yvon Chouinard, the founder of the Patagonia clothing brand and the author of *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman*. It was this book that inspired me (also a keen surfer) to build a business that puts 'planet before profit'. And it's a book that I still give to every new Adaptavate employee as they first enter the building. I believe this philosophy is core to building a business of the future and how we can 'do good' and 'do well' on an industrial and global scale.

## How are you funded?

Adaptavate is funded through a combination of sources including venture capital, grants, and private investments. The company has attracted funding from investors including *Innovate UK*, carbon removal venture capital fund, *Counteract* or *Perivoli Innovations*, which invests in companies that are meant to have beneficial impact on livelihood of humans in a more sustainable world and whose profits are ploughed back into social and climate projects in Africa. These are investors specifically interested in supporting sustainable technologies and green enterprises. This funding has been crucial for research and development, scaling up production, and expanding our market reach. We also make the most of government and industry grants aimed at promoting innovation and sustainability in construction.

# What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

The biggest challenge for Adaptavate, and for the launch of our plaster products has been market acceptance and integration of new, sustainable materials into traditional building processes, even though the products are designed by a builder, for builders. Overcoming this hurdle involves extensive education and demonstration of the value and performance of our products and giving builders and architects something more than just a specification or data to believe in. We try to connect with people on a more human and deeper level - tricky in the construction industry. We've addressed this challenge by investing in time to talk to and with the industry, with me and my team visiting sites, talking at industry events, providing robust case studies, and actively engaging with industry stakeholders from policy-makers to global manufacturers, company CEOs, plasterers, site foremen, to showcase the benefits and effectiveness of our technology and materials in real-world applications.

The main challenge scaling our board technology is the access to the capital to scale at the rate the world needs to abate the challenge we find ourselves in with regards to CO2 and resource challenges. We are driven by global impact and demonstrating a new way of doing business on an industrial and global scale and developing these partnerships is a complex field. But the future is bright!

## How does Adaptavate answer an unmet need?

Adaptavate addresses the unmet need for planet-positive, high-performance building materials in an industry often (fairly, I have to say) criticised for its high-carbon environmental impact.

By offering low-carbon and carbon-negative technologies and products that are both eco-friendly and high-performing, we provide solutions that help global product manufacturers, construction corporations, developers and builders reduce their carbon footprint, improve building health, and meet ESG obligations to their shareholders and to the planet. This meets a growing demand for materials that support sustainable development without compromising quality or affordability.

Our solutions are an important step towards decarbonising the construction industry.

## What's in store for the future?

The future for Adaptavate looks promising with plans to licence and deploy our core technology and establish key global partnerships to have a wider and immediate impact in the construction industry. We could be making carbon-negative materials on scale in 3 years with the right partnership! That is a radical change in our industry.

We also plan to keep developing our unique technology platform so we can provide different low-carbon and carbon-negative construction solutions, ensuring we maintain our global leading position. We want to be a catalyst for change in the construction industry. Adaptavate is also focused on influencing industry standards and practices to facilitate a wider adoption of planet-positive building materials.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

For other founders, particularly those in the industrial process sector, the key piece of advice would be to stay committed to your vision and values, even when faced with challenges. It's a long expedition! Building a business around innovative and disruptive technologies requires

perseverance and a strong belief in your mission to drive change, even when others will doubt you. I think the best thing you can do is to hire the best people around you and make sure you are the least qualified person in the team, whilst keeping a firm hand on the overall direction and strategy! This enables the idea to really grow and gather a force that you cannot do by yourself. This is how real impact is delivered.

## And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

As our rate of growth continues to accelerate, I have evolved as a person and now CEO. I try to spend as much time as possible doing the things that inspired me to start the business in the first place. I surf, cycle and mountain climb around my home in Wales as much as possible, hanging out with my family who are very effective in keeping me grounded. Most mornings start with cold outdoor shower, strong coffee and a good stretch! As a first-time founder, I also read a lot to help me grow and learn the things that spring up and surprise me every day. I can have 3-5 books about different things on the go at the same time and use these learnings to share with team members to help with a particular problem we are having or project we are delivering. I also try to meditate as often as possible but this is a bit of a journey to be honest. I know it is very positive but as with all tricky things - you don't always make the time!

Tom Robinson is the CEO and Founder of [Adaptavate](#).