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**Moderator questions in Bold**, Respondents in Regular text.

**KEY: Unable to decipher** = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

**Moderator: We're now going to move on to the part where you're going to hear from businesses in terms of the experiences they've had, the projects they have completed, and the impact that that has had. So, I'm going to ask Connor McCann from Simplyfruit, who's the Operations Director to come to the stage. Just to give you a bit of background about Simplyfruit, they were founded in the 1990s, a business, and they process fresh fruit. If I can get you just sit over there. In terms of the mission that they company have, they want to make healthy eating accessible and convenient for all, and sustainability is very much at the core of delivering that mission. In terms of the activities that the, the company has undertaken, I've had a, a great time having a chat with Connor about all that they've been doing, all they want to do, and I would encourage anybody to follow up and have a chat with them, because it really is awe inspiring. But they continually seek out innovative approaches to minimise waste, maximise nutritional value of every fruit, and every part of the fruit. Simplyfruit is an industry leader, and it, it certainly maximises the impact that they gain from research, collaboration and the passion for excellence comes through in spades. So do take the opportunity later on to have a, a chat with Connor, and I'm now going to move onto Energystore, and I would ask Connor McCandless to come up to the stage, and just to give you a little bit of background about Energystore, as Connor comes up. It was established in the 1980s, Connor's the MD, and their mission is to transform construction with free flowing installation. Can I get you to sit there? The reason I'm positioning them then it makes it easier because I can't say, 'Connor what do you think,' because they're both Connor.**

**So, at least I can turn to whoever I'm asking the question about. So, in terms of Energystore, they develop and install products that create a cleaner environment and improve energy efficiency wherever they're used. Not just for new builds but also for retrofit, so that they're, they're truly are capable of engaging with every type of building, and they ensure that their operations are sustainable, and that their products can contribute to low emissions construction. They operate throughout the Northern, Northern Ireland, Eire and GB markets. The HQ's in Holywood, and they have six manufacturing facilities on both sides of the Irish Sea. So, welcome guys, good to have a chat with you. I'm going to start of with just getting a bit of scene setting in terms, from both of you, as to what projects did you actually undertake, and Conner, I'm going to start with you first of all.**

Connor McCandless: Sure, well first thanks for the invite Vicky, and the plug, so maybe we'll get some insulation sales out of this. So, I think, we were looking at what we wanted to do from an emissions, and also from an energy bill perspective, which some of the guys already mentioned around '22, '23, when we

looked at the grant schemes, were getting particularly high. And I suppose we had a, a fair idea of what we wanted to do over the next five or six years to get towards net zero, and one of the projects that we were considering was putting solar panels on one of our manufacturing facilities in Larne. When we looked at it, 50 kilowatt system, it was a seven, seven and a half year payback, and we became aware of the, the grant scheme, and did a really simple, easy, fast application with Daniel Purdy from the team, and the grant we're able to get access to took the payback down from seven, seven and a half years to less than four years at the time. And then, you know, through events people have already mentioned, you know, energy prices went through the roof, like couple of months later, and actually the payback went down from four years to two, because energy prices, they sky rocketed in a way that we didn't expect. So, and it was really easy process for us to go through, and you know, it probably nudged us over the edge in making that decision at the time, and then, kinda, the way things transpired, it was an even better decision to have made because the prices went up.

**Moderator: And this was through, through the COVID scheme that was in operation that, that Invest implemented to help (mw 04.20) during that time, the forerunner to the current scheme?**

Connor McCandless: Yeah, exactly, and I think, I think we became aware of it maybe November, or December '21, something like that, and it had to be implemented before March.

**Moderator: Yeah.**

Connor McCandless: You probably know the scheme better than me-,

**Moderator: Fast turnaround yes.**

Connor McCandless: But, so to give you an idea, we went from it being an idea, being made aware of it, in November, December, and having the panels installed by February, and the grant drawn down by March. So, it's-, it really can be a, a quick, a quick process to get a yes or a no, and to, you know, access that support that makes some of these decisions a bit easier.

**Moderator: Okay, and Connor, if I turn to you just in terms of a bit of detail about the, the project you undertook.**

Connor McCann: Yes, so for us going into the project initially, we were starting from ground zero, so we had old machinery that we had moved from a previous site. The machinery was starting to get out of date, and not be as efficient as it should be, but it's not something that we would picked up on, or wouldn't have anyone with knowledge to advise us on that. So, the first step we took was receiving a consultant. So, we got an energy consultant, came on site, done a full audit of the factory, and was able to advise on some of

the easy fixes, easy wins. So, we went after them, a couple of them were fortunate enough to fall into the category of the first grant that was available, and in doing so we installed an energy monitoring system, and that now prioritises what projects we go after, and just as I explained to Vicky, we might have ten or twelve that we might be looking at for the next round of grants. But without previously having that experience in speaking with Invest NI, and the advisors, and the consultants, we wouldn't know where to start, or where to go. So, it really was a journey from nothing to hopefully, I'd like to think, we'll have our roof covered in solar panels in the next couple of months, or within this year, so that would be a massive turnaround for us, and a massive, a massive way that we can just not only reduce our costs, but, kind of, factor in the risk management of what is going to happen down the line. And there's a lot of things have happened in the last couple of years that none of us have expected, and none of us are future tellers. So, it future proofs us, and it helps us alleviate some of the issues that are potentially are coming on the track (ph 06.30).

**Moderator: So, two very different scenarios in terms of you knew what you wanted to do. You had no idea where you needed to start, but you were able to access that, that consultancy, that technical support and advice which is part of the scheme going forward, and I would encourage everyone to make use of that because it really does let you pinpoint those areas where you're going to get the really good bang for your buck in relation to it. And in terms of the scale of the project, could you both give me an idea of the, the scale of the projects? So, Connor.**

Connor McCann: Ours was relatively small about a £20,000 spend initially, but to get that data from an energy monitoring system has now gave us six or seven projects that would probably come up in the region of maybe 800,000 or a million spend between now and the, the, the next year. So, it really has been quite a journey rather than a couple of applications and things, and it's now something that we're always thinking about and looking out for when we go and buy new machinery. Is it compatible? Is it efficient? And will it be efficient? Is it the best way of doing it? And what can we replace for any of the fossil fuels, or any of the diesel trucks with electric forklifts and pallet trucks, and things of that nature. So, just something that we keep in the back of our minds, and it, it's paying off for us.

**Moderator: Okay, and Connor?**

Connor McCandless: I think, you know, pretty similar to what Connor said there, the first time around I think our project was 35,000, something like that, with a 20% grant, and now I think we've, sort of, cost it out, getting to net zero in the next five years, and it's probably somewhere between £2.5 to £3 million of investment. A lot of that will be in Northern Ireland, so a bit like Connor, we've got probably several projects we want to come and talk to you about once this is open.

**Moderator: And, and you mentioned about the solar panels on the Larne plant, and I said you had six facilities, so why did you choose the Larne plant? What was the, the decision?**

Connor McCandless: Yes, I think, I suppose for people that haven't put solar panels on their roofs yet, or maybe thinking about it, those six plants are in the UK, south of the border, north of the border, and it becomes quite complicated if you don't own the building. You know, it changes the rateable value, does the landlord get betterment, you know, do make a leak in the roof, those sorts of things, sort of, make it not that straight forward to put it on someone else's building. So, really it was a bit of, little less common denominator, and we own the property in Larne. It had a great big roof. Nothing more scientific than that, it was more that that it was the one that would actually work, and the others had other challenges outside of money to overcome to make it happen.

**Moderator: Okay, and Connor, why did you decide to take the steps when you did? What was the, the prompt and the push?**

Connor McCann: It was very much driven with cost at the time, just coming out of Brexit and COVID, and with having to maintain our competitive advantage, but just, on a couple of points that you just mentioned, yourself, are very important, a lot of the bits and pieces you say are the, the stumbling blocks for some people, it wouldn't even be on my radar. And that's where we really benefit from the advice from speaking to yourself, speaking to other people in the room, speaking with the advisors, and speaking with the technical that are with Invest NI. So, that we don't have those issues down the line.

**Moderator: Okay, and you told me an interesting fact, what's the only thing that use energy to heat?**

Connor McCann: For washing your hands.

**Moderator: Everything else comes from?**

Connor McCann: A heat exchanger that we've put in from the refrigeration packs.

**Moderator: I just, I just find that amazing when you're washing so much fruit, and the amount that it would take to do that, that that's, that's the only way that you're using energy, is to heat the water to wash your hands. So, what's your overall provision then for, for the business? I mean, energy conservation, sustainability, your low carbon footprint it's very much the core of your business, but what's your overall ambition?**

Connor McCandless: Yes, I think we, as you, kind of, touched on in the introductions Vicky, you know, we really are trying to position ourselves as being, moving away from, kind of, manufacturing insulation products, which is the business's history to more, essentially really being a, a sustainability business that focuses on construction. I guess, we've got two, sort of, strands to that, you know, sustainability mostly

we tend to think about the environment, although I guess there are other aspects to that when we look at an industry, construction's got a massive shortage of labour. So, when we look at things to evolve into, and what we try to invest in from an innovation, or an R&D perspective, we look for two things, one is can we make products that have lower emissions than the existing status quo, and can we make things that are simpler, or easier to use on site. So that we can either maybe make it more attractive because it's less hard on your body to work in construction, or maybe we make it simpler so that we don't have to find skilled labour to replace, you know, most of the skilled trades in construction in the UK and Ireland's are probably within ten years of retirement right now, and we're not training those people. So, can we make buildings in a different way that means that we can train people to a lower level to make the thing more successful? So, those are the two focuses for us around, you know, making the products we use more sustainable, and making the methods of, of, of getting those buildings built more sustainable. So, you know, sustainability and then carbon has really become our primary focus as a, a competitive advantage against other people in our industry.

**Moderator: Okay, and Connor, at Simply, Simplyfruit, what's, what's your core goal (talking over each other 11.50).**

Connor McCann: Yeah, so it, it-, I find it difficult to rank them, but obviously some of the, the big ones, emissions we're, we're all in-, we all have our own reasons for keeping emissions down, but on, on top of that, as you touched on with labour, we can replace labour with new machinery and upskill our staff, but that does require energy. So, we'll be more efficient in the long term, but we need to have that energy on-site, and there maybe limitations in the grid, especially where we are, in order to invest in the new machinery and be able to reduce those jobs and upskill the staff that we have to them be more qualified and on the new machines. So, energy efficiency, saving energy, and then just becoming more sustainable and making sure nothing goes to waste.

**Moderator: Yeah, and Connor you mentioned, like, there had been a USP for energy store, again in terms of the, the food industry it's becoming more and more important in terms of, of requirements.**

Connor McCandless: it, it's one of the-, it is a big driver, everyone wants to talk about it. Not necessarily always pushing for the cost savings, but as one of the larger companies in Northern Ireland, making the products that we make, we have to do it and we have to do it in a way that's going to benefit all of us in Northern Ireland and to be sustainable here for the long run. And, it's, it's the only way we can keep, keep running and keeping competitive, especially if we're competing with some of the larger companies in the UK.

**Moderator: And are you finding if you're going for tenders or, if, if there's jobs coming up, are you finding that that carbon footprint focus and the emissions reduction, is that part of the selection criteria now.**

Connor McCandless: Yeah, I wouldn't say as yet it's decisive, you know, if you don't have this you just can't get the work. It's, kind of, if-, and I wouldn't say people are paying massive premiums for it. 'Cause, you know, at the minute it can be more expensive to be more sustainable. But if you're, kind of, you know, if there's not much in it and one, one product, or one offering is sustainable. We do increasingly see the clients choose the sustainable option and we are starting to see that, you know, the bigger, sort of, PLC type clients that we have some of in the UK. We're getting 200 question questionnaires about our sustainability and, you know, our different scope emissions. And where our suppliers are based, you know, lots and lots of detail and you might get this out of left field and be asked to answer it within a week. These sorts of things and those companies are starting to move towards, 'This is voluntary.' And it's gonna become less voluntary, and then it's gonna become mandatory and then, you know, you're just not gonna be allowed to work with them unless you do it. So, it's an advantage to move early, you-, right now, to maybe win work. But I think in the next kinda 5 years it's going to be a severe disadvantage if you haven't done these things.

**Moderator: And in terms of getting the ideas of, of how you can apply technology, because things are applicable across sectors, it doesn't have to be someone that, that's a competitor to you. How do you find out about what's happening, or what's going on in terms of, of development? Connor, if I come to you.**

Connor McCann: First off, working with the guys and investing in, like, technical consultancy, gives a basic understanding of what we needed to do. Then I have the right questions to ask people and certainly it's through speaking to Connor, picking his brains about solar and heat pumps and, and I'm not finished yet. So, once you have a bit of an understanding what to look out for, it gives you the right track to go down and starts to fall in under that track. But very much so, getting a good consultant, someone that's gonna teach rather than hand you a report, find to be very valuable. And by all means, you can try more than one consultant, you'll hear a couple of ways of doing things. And whether that be expertise in heat recovery, solar. There is experts for essentially everything and it just needs to be utilised.

**Moderator: Okay, and what's your source of, of inspiration and understanding of future developments?**

Connor McCandless: It's probably quite similar to what Connor said there, I mean, firstly I think some of this-, some of the general concepts aren't that difficult. Even if you haven't started or you're an expert and I'm certainly not at the end-, at that end of that spectrum yet. But, it's kinda-, we need to use less energy and we need to not throw stuff in the bin and we need to use sustainable energy. You know, that's-, I don't think that's a revelation for anyone in the room, but we have somehow managed to make that quite complicated, over the-, you know, your companies might find reasons not to do thing, you know. It is expensive, but in the long-term it pays off, so, you know, the steps we had to make, I think we probably all deep down know them, it's just about trying to make those steps and it's not, it's not, you know, one massive steps and it's all over. You've gotta make little steps as you go, but it's definitely, to what Connor said, around talking to other people. You know, this, I think is the one thing where you don't actually

have competitors, you can talk to your competitors. It's a lot easier to talk to people that are not in your industry, you know, as Connor has touched on when we were chatting earlier. And I think, you know, within about 30 seconds we found out he's got something that's a waste product for me, that might be of use to me. And, you know, those kind of conversations can happen all the time. So, yes, I think it's, kind of, as he said, sort of, chatting to people which shouldn't be a problem for people from Belfast.

**Moderator: Absolutely. And, as-, if I asked you to, to think in terms of, of the process you went through and the project that you undertook. Is there anything that you would've done differently, I'll ask you first?**

Connor McCann: Certainly from my aspect, I found it to be very beneficial to have someone check over what you're doing and say, 'Yeah, look, that's a-, go for that.' Or, maybe you might need to reevaluate this, very much more of a learning suggestion. There's no wrong answers, we could throw twenty projects and the guys would say, 'Right, pick three, four, five, six and go from there.' And I suppose that's-, if it's not right now, it might be in three or four years time, the technology improves. It presents itself and then it's something to revisit. I definitely wouldn't rule anything out and not revisit after a couple of years.

**Moderator: Yeah, so keep going back round the loop, 'cause it may come into, into hope.**

Connor McCann: It has proven too, yeah. Absolutely.

**Moderator: Okay, anything you would do differently?**

Connor McCandless: So, I think firstly, you know, we're really happy with the project. But, you know, I think if we were to do it again, I would put in a battery alongside the solar panels, so that we used all of what we-, what we generated on the roof. Rather than just, you know, when we happen to be in the factory, you know, and on a sunny Saturday if you're not working, it's so, kind of, a waste. And I'd probably put more panels on the roof, we have space for 200 kilowatts and we put on 50. So, I'd probably, you know, and what we will do next, hopefully we get a, get a successful application. But we'll probably, we'll probably look to go to 200 kilowatts and put a, put the battery in as well. It means that we're using 100% of what we're generating.

**Moderator: Okay. Yep, and if you were to try and encourage other businesses to take the step, yes it may be costly, yes you may have an upfront investment, but there's benefits to be got from it. What would you say to them, how would you convince them?**

Connor McCandless: Realistically, for a fact finding, the initial part didn't cost us, we, we got the technical advice. We were able to ask questions, there was no one checking their watch and making sure

you don't go beyond anything, or you didn't get an answer for immediately. We got the answers that we were looking for down the line. I really-, what is there to lose? It, it's not a whole pilot time, it's worth doing the research and it is a journey that you can't duck and dive. We, we have to look at this and it, it's not something that's going to go away. Energy prices aren't going to drop and we must be sustainable.

**Moderator: Okay, anything you want to add?**

Connor McCann: Probably pretty similar again, to what Connor said. I, I think we've looked around, you know, both from a Northern Ireland locally, GB and European level, what grant funding and support there is from government or other, or other organisations to do this. And there really is very, very little available so this is quite a generous support scheme and if it's anything like the last one, it's very easy and painless to, to apply for. So, you haven't got a lot of options if you're looking for support, and this is a great one I think, that's probably what I'd say. And some of the first steps are probably less scary and probably a bit easier than you might appreciate.

**Moderator: Okay, that's great guys. I'm gonna open up the, the floor now for questions if there's anybody wants to ask a question or, or add any, any advice they have, or any thoughts they have. Yep, got one over there, good man.**

Stuart McCormick: Okay, so first ones for-, introduce myself first. I'm Stuart McCormick from (inaudible 20.26) . So, the reason I came here was because I'm speaking to businesses quite often. So, it's, if they're potentially going to apply for this scheme, how can I help them to do it, or who can I point them in the direction of? So, I was speaking to a guy yesterday who owns a guest house with 12 rooms. And a bar/kitchen, and he was thinking about putting in a new kitchen. For this scheme, does he have to have an energy consultant, like you mentioned Connor, to have a report for him to show what his emissions currently are? To then prove how his new project is going to reduce those emissions. Question that was, sort of, aimed at everybody I suppose, (inaudible 21.14) . Connor, you're an energy consultant was that a self-funded thing, or was, were you supported with that?

Connor McCandless: We were, we got support for that, we, we got a grant. I think it was 3 or 4 days spaced out over a number of weeks, guys came on site, put on data loggers onto some of the key areas within our factory. We reviewed the data, we-, exactly, the information we got from that then helped us apply for the grant with the carbon emissions and savings based on what we'd found. And then going beyond that, realising how useful the data was, we permanently installed a data logger so that we can now track and see if someone has left the kitchen door open, kind of thing, and the fridge is running on, or any of the bits and pieces like that. So, it technically-, Smart Energy Solutions came on site, done an audit, listed off five or six easy projects. Or, if you've a project that you want to have them to look at, by all means, they'll come in, look at it, do measurements, give you the data and then with that you can make up any decisions.



Stuart McCormick: Brilliant, thank you.

**Moderator: So, so that technical support is, is available to everyone but you don't have to go in that way, if you know what you want to do-,**

Stuart McCormick: Yeah.

**Moderator: Then you can make the application. But I'm gonna hand over to Daniel or Paul just to pick up in terms of the new kitchen bit and, and just if you wanna give us, Daniel, a flavour of how to, to access the funding, there's a mic there behind you.**

Daniel: Hi, hello, my name is Daniel Purdy, I manage the energy and resource efficiency team within the Invest NI, so relating to the actually projects in the application stage, what we do is, yes, we will be wanting to see before and after results. So, you're gonna be predicting the after results once you put the new technology in. The 3 things that we're gonna be looking for is first, energy reduction. Which then relates to carbon reduction and then will also be a financial saving there. And now based on that there are eligibility criteria that every project must fulfil. So, that's the-, in terms of the application form, as the guys have thankfully said, it's quite a simple process, you know, so it's a spreadsheet, the numbers are put in. If it's complicated, yes, you can come ahead and ask for technical consultancy, you can use your own consultants. A lot of the, a lot of the suppliers would provide that type of information and that type of support. So, we want to see the numbers, we wanna make sure that it's fulfilling the, the 25% reduction, 'Cause there is an ultimate aim as well as helping business here in this scheme. So, if that's done the, the best thing probably to do is put an enquiry in, in our technical team, you know, can provide that advice to whoever the business are.

Stuart McCormick: Yes, thank you. And a less serious one for Connor McCandless. The sun never shines in Larne.

Connor McCandless: We actually joked the other way, to be honest, in that office anytime anyone goes to Larne it always seems to be sunny. So, I guess it just depends how you look at things.

Stuart McCormick: I'm from (inaudible 23.58) , so. I don't know if there was a follow up to that?

Connor McCandless: No, no, that's me, thank you very much.

**Moderator: Any other questions, comments from the floor? I'm not, I'll not extend this any further. What I would ask is could I ask Daniel, Paul and Bernie to, to stand up so that if you do have any**

questions that you want to ask, regarding it. Please feel free to nab them while you've got them in the room and they will give you more information and in terms of understanding their journey, their experience, I would encourage you to have a chat with the two Connors. 'Cause it really is interesting to hear the journeys that they are on, and the visions that have in a bit more detail. So, without further ado, as we wind up this session, could I just ask you to show your appreciation to the two Connors, to (inaudible 24.49) .

Captions by Verbit Go.