

Transcript of 'Shopping for Plastics'

Season 2, Episode 16, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Jan: In today's episode, you'll learn about the PPIPL plastic packaging project, the role of supermarkets and hitting the global net zero target, and what happens to the bread in Booths at the end of the day. So let's get into our episode with Jane Routh and Katie Gwynne from Booths Supermarket.

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow, the podcast from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business at Lancaster University Management School. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Paul: Jan, we're gonna carry on looking at the Plastic Packaging in People's Lives project, and it's about time we took it out to the businesses themselves, the organisations that have been working with the PPIPL project and discover a bit more about how they've fitted into the whole scheme.

Jan: That's brilliant to have Transforming Tomorrow on the road again. We like going on the road.

Paul: Yeah, the last time we were on the road, your car broke down. So I, I should reassure our listeners that all cars arrived safely this morning and that no one has been abandoned in the countryside because we've made a little journey down south.

Down south relatively, as we've been discussing amongst ourselves before the podcast is morning to, uh, Longridge, just near Preston, to the headquarters of Booths, the supermarket group.

Jan: And I've only been in Lancaster four years. I don't even know Booths existed because I haven't lived, um, either, well, I've either lived much further north in Scotland or much further south in Birmingham.

So it was a revelation to discover Booths and, um, yeah, we, we've got a local shop near us. We like them. We like your food. So very pleased to meet some folks from the place itself.

Paul: Yeah, I, I've grown up in this area, so I've known about Booths entire, my entire life, although the nearest one to me in Ulverston, um, has only been there I'd say 10 or 15 years.

So before that, Kendal was the thing. So whenever we went on a nice trip to Kendal, it was Booths and that was a special treat, um, to, to go to Booths the supermarket. A bit, a bit of a different place. But now, they, they've spread out a bit more, and there's a few more of them and we'll find out exactly how many when we introduce our guests.

Jan: Absolutely. Well, let's do that now then.

Paul: Yes. We're joined today by Jane Routh, who is the Safety and Environment Manager, and Katie Gwynne, who is the Head of Business Risk and Compliance at Booths Supermarkets. Welcome to you both.

Jane: Thank you.

Katie: Thank you. Good morning.

Paul: Well, I suppose the first thing is, can you tell some of our listeners who are not based up here in the Northwest of England about Booths, a little bit about what the business is and how, how big it is, and where it, where you operate.

Katie: So we are a food retailer. So we have 26 stores and they range from up north as Penrith, as down south as Cheshire over into Yorkshire, and of course in Lancashire.

So we've also got manufacturing sites. So we manufacture our own meat products. We do our own fruit and veg products, and we pack ambient good products as well. So, um, as well as the HQ that you are now sat in. We have been going for 176 years. We are still family run. Mr. Booth is Executive Chairman. We have, uh, an ethos that's around being the 'good grocers'.

So everything that we do focuses around is it the right thing to do, whether that's for our people, whether that's for the products, whether that's for our customers, our communities, um, and realistically we do a huge amount of work behind the scenes to make sure that every decision that we make is right and it's the right decision for our community, essentially.

Paul: [teasing] 176 years Jan, that's almost as old as your country.

Jan: Watch it [jokingly, everyone laughs]. That was a, that was a bit of an aside wasn't it.

[Group laughs, some indistinguishable speech]

Paul: When was New Zealand founded officially? Uh, no, I feel like I'm asking you questions that someone who wants to become a New Zealand citizen has to answer.

Jan: Well, technically 1300 when the, the first Polynesians arrived, you see? So you are thinking...

Paul: I've become very colonial then.

Jan: Yeah, yeah.

Paul: When was it, uh, established in its current form then?

Jan: Uh, sort of 1840 or so, yeah.

Paul: So essentially, yeah, about the same age, same age as Booths?

Jane: We, we 1847 was our...

Jan: Oh, wow. There we are. We've got something in common already.

Jane and Katie: Yes.

Paul: A long history that, let, let's just put it that way, Jan. Let's, let's not, you know, get into the, the intricacies of New Zealand and how old it is because obviously it's old as the planet earth, essentially.

Jan: Yes, indeed, indeed, indeed...

Paul: ...a landmass, et cetera.

Jan: But also we might come back to this as well. Um, my ears of course pricked up when you say family business, 'cause we've talked about family business before on the podcast and indeed, you know, the Pentland group is a family business as well. And I think there's something kind of special and lovely going on...

Jane: ...absolutely...

Jan: ... once you're in a family business.

Katie: And I, and I, you know, working for Booths, I've worked for Booths for 12 years and actually it is like working in a family, with your family, you know it, it has a very family feel, from our customers feel that as well.

You know, so it is fabulous.

Jane: And also as a, as a, as a manager, as somebody who makes change, you can actually see the change happen really quickly 'cause you, you're there, you know, it's, you've not got lots of layers between you and the end.

Paul: One of the things I loved when we came into the headquarters here at Longridge this morning, all the people here, sitting about seem very happy here.

I dunno if that's mainly because the, there's a lovely canteen that seems to be serving gorgeous food and that's, you know, that would make anyone happy. But it is a very nice community kind of feel to, to the headquarters.

Katie: Yeah. I think if you ask most people that worked at Booths, what was the thing that makes you love your job? And I, I think 95% of them will say the people.

Jan: Yeah.

Katie: Because, there is something quite special about working for Booths.

Jane: Yeah, I agree.

Paul: And is the other 5% in the food sampling that you get to do?

Katie: And that as well! [general laughter]

Katie: Not good for the waistline?

Jane: It should come with a warning. You will have...

Katie: ...yeah...

Jane: ...an extra inch, inch or two by the time...

Katie: Yes, we should, absolutely. Our contract should come with a health warning.

[General laughter]

Paul: Katie, thanks very much for introducing the company then.

Katie: Mm-hmm.

Paul: So how about a little bit about yourselves and your roles, because obviously that's gonna become important when we talk about how you fit into the PPIPL project.

Katie: Okay, so my role, Head of Business Risk and Compliance.

So essentially I look after all of the property and the estate portfolio for the business, the security and the safety of our colleagues and our customers. And under that umbrella fits the Safety and Environment team, which Jane will, uh, introduce herself as well. So quite a broad sort of remit, but really interesting and diverse from my point of view.

Jane: Uh, thanks, Katie. Um, yeah. So I'm Jane Routh. I look after the Safety team as, as Katie, Katie mentioned. And also, um, from an environment point of view, I head up the environment plan for us as a business. We are only a really, really small team. We haven't got lots of layers. So yeah. So that's, that's me.

Jan: So given that remit, Jane, how has Booths dealt with the issue of sustainability in the past? What kind of things have been happening under, under your watch there?

Jane: Well, we, we have a plan which has developed over the last few years, and like I said, I've only been with the, um, environment team as such, um, for the last four years. And I, I, I definitely believe sustainability comes quite easily to us as a business, 'cause as Katie mentioned, we absolutely want to do the right thing.

It feels...normal, natural. Um, and some of the things that we've, we've been doing over the last few years, and obviously what we plan to do in the future are food waste reduction, we signed up to the WRAP, and we've been working really, really hard on food waste reduction.

We've gone into partnership with Too Good to Go, um, to help sort of widen that net for making sure that the product doesn't go in the bin. Um, we've introduced LED lighting across our business, all our, um, stores and our manufacturing sites. We work really, really closely with our supply chain. So we don't have huge food mileage for some of our products, um, where possible we're really, really local.

So we try and keep within the Northwest if possible. It's not always possible, obviously we want a fantastic range of products, but, um, where possible we'll,

um, work really closely with our, um, suppliers locally. And we've tried to get them to engage with the LEAF accreditation, so that's looking about sustainable farming.

Paul: Just one of the things you mentioned there, you say you signed up to the WRAP. What's the WRAP?

Jane: So, so, so WRAP look after the government sort side of def, is it DEFRA, for food waste and they, they have a target in line with the UN overall food Reduction targets that they want businesses to sign up for and basically have a plan of how they're gonna tackle food waste within their business.

And we've signed up for it for five years, I think now?

Katie: Yeah. So essentially it means that we, every year we report on how much food goes in the bin, what percentage of food that we sell, put on our shelves, ends up in the bin, um, or down a drain or whatever that sort of looks like. And, and we can then measure ourselves in terms of reducing that, you know, um, we've done some massive work on that.

Jane: Yeah. And one of those things is, um, and it was a really simple thing, which when you look back, you think, why didn't we do it earlier? But, so when you come into our cafes and, um, have a cup of tea, we give you a little jug of milk. And some of the milk jugs were very large and we filled the milk up to the top.

And a lot of customers don't want a lot of milk, so they'll just put tiny bit, or none at all. And all that milk was then going...in the bin.

Katie: To waste.

Jane: Yeah. So, uh, we made a, a, a clear step change by measuring the milk in, in, in the start. We understood how much was going in the bin, so we were able to reduce the jugs down to a really small size.

And, but if you want more, you can have more. It's not, we're not saying you can't have more, but you know, the options there rather than wasting the products in the first place.

Jan: And I like the way that you're sort of like, 'cause, uh, the customer service is at the heart of it. But putting behind that, you know, data and measurement to then sort of redesign it, that's one of the really sort of great motifs of sustainability in business is actually you need to know a bunch of data.

Jane: You need need to measure, uhuh.

Jan: Yeah, exactly. And then go forward...

Katie: ...and without that data making decisions is actually really hard, 'cause you almost a little bit blind, you know? And we've done really simple things like at the end of the night, instead of throwing bread in the bin, for instance.

We give it to all of our colleagues to take home and use and do what you know, and that is they're, they're only really incremental changes, but actually they make a massive difference...

Jan: ...yeah...

Katie: ...to our food waste as a business. So there's a lot going on in that, in that sort of space as well.

Jane: So in addition to all the points that I've mentioned, we have been looking at packaging, which fits really nicely with the project.

We've been looking at the full Booths brand range and where we can actually remove packaging if possible, or change the packaging type. Is it widely recyclable? So that's some of the, the, um, we've got Gemma, um, who looks after Booths rand. She's working closely with the environment team to see what that looks like.

Paul: Yeah. So that, that's great about that. And you also mentioned LEAF, which I think ties in a little bit with the work that we did with the Lake District Farmers. I don't know if you did work with the Lake District Farmers particularly, but that kind of looking at the way that food is produced and working with local farmers and that, that's, that's a really good tie in for as far as sustainability goes.

And the way that that sort of, the way they talked about it at the Lake District Farmers was how they breed the cattle, how they breed the sheep, how they breed all their animals there, how they do the farming and putting sustainability practices in there. And this is from the angle of working with local, regional, so you've not got food traveling thousands of miles when it doesn't need to. So that's really interesting as well, that tie-in there.

Jan: It is indeed. And I suspect there, there will be, there will be produce from the Lake district that ends up on your shelves for sure.

Katie: Absolutely.

Jane: Absolutely, yeah, yeah, without a doubt.

Jan: I, I may have acquired some recently. Just saying. Marsh lamb, say no more, say no more. Anyway, we're going off a tangent, because you said food, so I went off on um, lamb chops. I don't know what happened to me. [General laughter] Um, so, so could you tell us about how you encountered the PPIPL Project and how you've been involved in that process?

Katie: So I, um, started the PPIPL project probably four years ago, I'm gonna say four years ago, I think it was about four years ago. And I was contacted by Alison and it was a, would you like to be involved? This is a project we're doing, and we kind of started with, yeah, we're happy to be involved. We will give a certain amount of time and we'll offer you some data, which was wonderful.

And we started down that road and, and, and that was great. Um, but actually as we got further into the project, we realised that actually we had so much more to give. That we were able to really help this project grow some legs, um, and give some real insight into what it's like to be a retailer. And then Jane sort of came on board and, and started taking over and, and, and I think she's gonna talk you through some of the stuff that she's done as well.

Jane: Yeah, so working closely with Alison and the team we looked at what customer engagement we can, we can do. So the team at Lancaster spent some time in two of our stores, Scotforth and Keswick, engaging with our customers over what makes them choose a product in regards to packaging. If it was made of recycled product, does that affect or influence their decision making?

Which fits in really, really nicely what Gemma and the team are doing in regards to packaging and, you know, that helps us make those decisions. So it, we, we just felt it really fitted in beautifully with what we want to do as a business. It also gave us a bit more understanding of the product and the whole lifecycle of packaging, and we were able to get involved with the front end, you know, the producers as well as the, the council, you know, the authorities that are dealing with the waste at the end. So it was a really nice sort of full circle really.

Paul: It really does sound like it was perfect timing that you were already taking on this work...

Jane: ...absolutely, yeah....

Paul: ...you came along and got involved at the start of PPIPL maybe imagining a smaller role, but then, hang on, this is just a perfect fit with what we're already doing.

Jane: Yeah, and, and you know, from my own personal experience - environment, you know, it's new, it's new for me and from a business point of view, so it was really good to, to meet with other people that, you know, uh, have different influences within that sort of cycle.

Katie: And it, I guess from the, from the customer perception point of view, it was great for us to get some of that feedback, you know, um, and to understand what our customers are thinking. So I think it was, like you say, Paul, it was a perfect fit for us as a business as well. And it's been really great, hasn't it?

Jane: It has, yes. It's been really, really interesting.

Jan: Well, this might be a really good time then to ask about some of the lessons that you learned from that, that work.

Jane: What was really interesting I found was the customer perception and their potentially lack of understanding really about recycling, packaging, what happens to products once they've popped it in their waste bin at home. And also potentially the decision making before, especially around that balance between food safety, shelf life, um, from a food perspective and the actually pack, uh, plastic especially.

It's not always the baddy, you know, we do, we do need plastic packaging from a food safety point of view. So it's just having that, that nice balance. So that was the most interesting thing for me actually, that we've got out of this as a business, is that customer perception and that customer understanding.

Katie: And I, I think for me, just, just sort of touching on what Jane said there is that she mentioned about that full cycle.

I think for me it's been really interesting to kind of open your eyes in terms of, it's a joint effort. This isn't something that we can fix immediately. You know, we, we can't solve all the problems on our own and make all of those decisions because there are so many different knock-on effects to decisions that we make. For, for example, you know, knock on for the local authorities, knock on for suppliers, you know, and, and ultimately I think for me, the key learning

was this is a joint effort and we all need to be aligned in terms of what are we doing, how are we gonna do it.

Jane: And I, I was just gonna add to that Katie as well. The journey really probably hasn't finished for us yet as well. We're still working with Alison and we're looking at actually what can we do with the, uh, Lancaster City Council and that communication at maybe our Scotforth store and our Carnforth store that are in the Lancaster District, and how can we work in partnership with the council on, on getting a better understanding for the customer so they know actually I need to wash that product before I put it in the recycling bin.

I need to do this, this product's okay to be recycled. So it really helps drive that for the council. But then obviously it gives us, helps us with that responsibility of customers knowing what to do with our product.

Paul: And in a couple of episodes of time, we're gonna get that perspective from the Lancaster City Council point of view. See what, how they view this relationship. 'Cause they get. Like you say, working all together is gonna be vital under this, so they'll have things to say about how they see it from, from that.

I, I just wonder from a customer's perspective, certainly in the last few years, it's noticeable that supermarkets are taking on a lot more responsibility for collecting soft plastics in stores, now. I don't know the exact reason behind it. I think that there was some kind of government mandate that may have been in there that like supermarkets now have to take more responsibility for recycling more of their own plastic.

Do you feel that there is more responsibility expected of you as an organisation now when it comes to what customers do with things after they've left your shelves and left your supermarket?

Katie: I mean, from a business point of view, for me, we absolutely have a responsibility and, and that's not just packaging, it's food waste.

We have a responsibility to make sure that our customers are understanding of what happens when they leave our store in terms of their packaging. We absolutely have a responsibility. There is things coming from the government that will mandate us making sure that that absolutely happens, but morally, we have that responsibility.

If we are giving a customer any product, we should make sure that they're educated enough to know how to dispose of that packaging properly, how to use up their food waste, all of that sort of stuff we have responsibility for.

Jane: Yeah, and, and likewise making sure that we've used the best material possible to make sure that it can be recycled. You know, look at the shift change from black plastic, you know? Um, and it's not perfect yet.

We're, we're not exactly there yet, but it's something we're working on. But, you know, people have moved to clear plastic across the sort of industry really 'cause they know it's easily recycled.

Katie: And I think there's so much more focus from a consumer point of view now. It's so much more, you know, people are almost demanding this now of, and they're expectant of retailers. And the people that are selling them this product to tell them exactly what they need to do because they want to do the right thing.

And, and ultimately I think they're becoming so much more demanding that you, you kind of have to go with that wave.

Paul: And this ties in with what we've covered across a lot of the episodes around PPIPL, that it's not just one area. So then going back in the supply chain, if you want to the, the suppliers you are working with, I guess that you need to have a lot of discussions with suppliers who are providing the materials that come in here and how they approach plastics.

Jane: Yeah, absolutely. And, and obviously as we mentioned, uh, you know, earlier on in, um, our chat, some of our suppliers are really, really small, so, you know, sometimes changing that packaging for them is a massive investment.

So it's about, you know, working with them to try and get the best product that we can at that particular time. But also having an understand that if we've already got 10,000 packs of trays, it would be morally wrong to put that in the bin just to shift to a better, so it's about making sure that the, the whole sort of supply chain is aligned and that we're not unnecessarily wasting product,

Katie: and that we are helping the supplier as well to make the right decisions at conception. So when we go to a supplier and say, we want a new product for our Christmas book, for example, we are helping giving them the information that says, but we don't want this type of material.

These are the types of materials that we would expect from our packaging so that actually we're not in a position where we're having to throw away a load of packaging because we've, we've changed specification, that actually we we're getting it right and we're helping educate our suppliers.

As Jane says, some of them are, are really small. There's some big suppliers that we can't necessarily influence in the same space, you know, because of our size, um, but there are a wealth of suppliers that we absolutely can.

Jan: What I really like about what you've been talking about is the, the sort of like the joint responsibility and the difficulty and um, nature of joint responsibility in reality.

So what kind of timeframes are involved from making that move and, and can some be fast and some be slow, and how does that play out?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. You know, some things, as I've said, there's some, some suppliers we can influence quite easily and quite quickly, and we can do that from conception, which is the fastest way of doing it ultimately...

Jan: ...yeah...

Katie: ...let's get it right first time round. But then there are some, particularly some of the bigger suppliers, that it, it becomes a little bit harder and until there's maybe four or five of their big customers saying the same thing, that actually things won't necessarily change.

Jane: We are in the process currently at the moment of changing over, so our meat trays, the, it's a clear plastic tray, which is fantastic from where it was a black tray originally, but it's got a soaker pad in that obviously collects any fluid that's in the pack. Um, we're trying to get rid of that soaker pad, so we've trialled some, a new concept tray that collects the fluid within the tray itself, so you don't need that extra layer of packaging.

But we've got the trays in the process, you know, already in the store, um, in manufacturing waiting to be used. So it is literally, it's gonna be about three or four months before that old packaging's gone, before we can make that transition. So it really does depend on the product.

Jan: I shall watch out for that then, because...[laughter]

Jane: ...it's on its way.

[People speaking over each other]

Paul: It will make when you buy those lamb chops, all the more exciting, Jan.

[Everyone laughs]

Katie: even better still, if you buy them from the counter.

Jan: I do tend to do...

Katie: ...there is very little packaging because it's...

Jan: Yeah, we do, we do the counter shop more so, because then we can get the right number.

Katie: And did, you know, you can bring your own to the, uh, raw counter. So if you bring a um, tupperware with you, we will put it in there for you. And then, then there's no packaging whatsoever.

Jan: I did not know that.

Katie: There you go!

Jan: But there, so there we are. [people laughing] Thank you for bringing me here, Paul, to, to, to learn all sorts of things.

Paul: Every day's a school day Jan.

Jan: Yes, indeed. And so what you also said there, which sort of my ears pricked up at, is that. So like, you know, regionally, you're, you're, you know, a supermarket chain, but in the whole scope of the UK a small chain in the mix.

So do you have a sense of, you know, what kind of critical mass is needed from the other supermarkets asking the same kind of questions and asking for the same kind of packaging products as you are before things change in reality.

Jane: I, uh, definitely without doubt, you know, the, the, the larger retailers have got the influence because, um, for, for most of our largest suppliers, um, we are a tiny, tiny dot in their sort of portfolio of customers.

So we do rely on them pushing that change through, and then we will obviously be able to get on the, you know, the bandwagon. [inaudible]

Katie: Um, you know, this is where we sort of utilise some of the relationships that we have with organisations such as the British Retail Consortium.

So we are members of the BRC, so that means that we are able to meet and join calls with, with other retailers, some of the bigger retailers, and we kind of

can have an input in that way as well. Um, just to try and help them, we can share learnings that we've found and we can show them what we are seeing in the market to try and help them and influence them as well to start talking about this.

Jan: And, um, if, if you forgive me, Paul, I'm gonna be slightly geeky. Um, so within an, an academic context, what we'd often find is that, you know, the, the entrepreneurs, so the norm entrepreneurs, the people that promote new ideas and different ways of doing things aren't always the largest.

Katie: No.

Jan: So, so in that respect, novelty and innovation can come from small players and perhaps more likely to come from small players as well.

So like all power to your elbow on that one because you can add things in especially going through a, a you know, a trade body, uh, like the British Retail Consortium and then that has such a bigger sort of leverage effect.

Katie: Absolutely.

Jan: So we love entrepreneurs, I like leverage. All of these things are a way of getting sustainable development more into the mainstream.

Katie: Absolutely.

Paul: I'm gonna talk about some of your research and keystone actors.

Jan: Oh, are you.

Paul: Because it seems to be you've, you've essentially, without using the words 'keystone actors' referred to keystone actors there where, you've got, if you can get the major bodies in any particular area, acting in a certain way, then that can have an influence across, uh, so much of the sector.

It can, if you've got your biggest supermarkets in this country, asking their suppliers to make changes, they're more likely to do it. So you've got that keystone actor effect, which is the work you do, Jan, albeit around the seafood industry. But that could, you know, you could see how that could apply very much here in supermarkets.

Jan: And indeed our conversation, dear listeners, you'll remember we talked to the World Federation of the sporting goods industry, which had exactly the same feel to it. You never knew there was such a thing, it's fantastic. And so

again, they, it's a, an industry that has lots of challenges to deal with and they can deal with it collectively and take some of it out of the competitive space, but in other ways actually competing to be the best at having very good packaging is also a driver of change as well.

Katie: For sure. Sometimes it only takes one person to put their head above the parapet and say, no, we are taking a stand and this is what we're doing. To kind of help nudge gently everybody else to start thinking in that sort of space.

Jan: I like the fact you're nudging them gently. You're probably giving them a shock.

[General laughter]

Paul: And I, I don't need to name names unless there's a particular supermarket brand you really want to slag off just for fun, but what do you find the attitudes are amongst the other members of the British Retail Consortium? You know are they having similar attitudes to you, to their approach towards sustainability?

Katie: For sure. You know, from my point of view, everybody wants to do the right thing. As a business, there are some challenges, commercial challenges, you know, and I think it's about trying to find the right way for us all, and sometimes that is about putting that competitiveness to one side and figuring out how we can do it as a, a whole.

But absolutely everything that I hear in, in some of those forums is about everybody wanting to do the same thing. And, uh, lots of people are in, in different, different places, but we're all heading into the same space.

Jane: Yeah. And just just on that, Katie, you know, you talked about, uh, I suppose being agile 'cause we're smaller, regenerative farming in some respects, we, we met recently a farmer that's looking at, um, regenerative farming, but his volume is quite small. So actually for, for our size of business, it fits, you know, so, so in some respects, sometimes being smaller is, it enable, enables you to, you know, to access things that potentially some of the, the larger organisations can't because the, the scale isn't quite there yet and it takes time for that scale.

Katie: And I, and I guess, you know, for, for a farmer like that, being able to get in with a business like us will then allow them to upscale that and sort of drive

that change and that volume change to allow them to then be a little more accessible.

Jan: And I think it also, in some ways we're coming, circling around to where we started off, is that innovation happens in place as well and being embedded in this region, um, and the food producing businesses of this region actually then creates a really nice circular synergy. And we are talking about the circular economy, so I had to get circular in there at some stage.

Paul: Having said then that you, there's quite a positive attitude towards it all. What are you finding inspiring at the moment in this space when it comes to supermarkets and their behaviour around it all?

Jane: I, I think from my perspective, it, it is just the recent shift. Uh, you, I've seen momentum over the last couple of years. As an example, probably a good 10 years ago, we tried to remove packaging from peppers. So you buy three peppers for...

Jan: ...oh, yeah, yeah...

Jane: ...together as a, we tried to remove that and still have the offer on that if you buy three individual peppers, you still get the offer, but customers just did not buy into it. They wanted the convenience of being able to grab that pack of three peppers regardless of the packaging.

Whereas actually, I think now if we trial that again, I think there will be a shift and, and that's the best thing for me that people are understanding, because of some of the high profile, the way they, the just the news and the momentum is, is going, I, I feel like we can be a bit more adventurous with some of the things that we want to try, like bringing your own packaging, you know, let's, let's get rid of the packaging.

I appreciate there's always a balance from food safety point of view and you, you know, we've gotta be careful, tread carefully with certain products, but, but I, I love that shift. I, I do feel that momentum's there.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I see it in, in loads of other retailers. This now is part of their proposition essentially. You know, I think 10 years ago their proposition was their product. Now their proposition feels so much wider.

It feels as though actually sustainability is sitting on people's purposes as a business, you know, we are seeing concept stores of packaging free stores. You know, some of that stuff is absolutely inspiring.

You know, whether on volume that that is even possible and, and whether it takes off is, is another story. But the fact that I think people are bold enough now to go and have a go and to see what people think and actually that it's, that it's even a conversation I think is, is pretty inspiring at the moment.

Paul: What about sustainability generally? How do you feel the sector feels towards that?

Katie: So in the past, I would say probably 12 to 18 months, I have spent more time than I anticipated talking with people in, um, retail, other retailers about Net Zero and about how do we actually get there?

And, and the conversation is, is not, are we gonna get there? The conversation is how we gonna get there? And, and that shifted quite considerably. I think that, you know, probably a few years ago people would be saying, well, is it, is it, is it gonna work? Is it a thing? Can we even do it? Now, it's right. Well, how are we gonna get there? We've got to get there, and how are we gonna do it?

And some of those conversations are really inspiring and that there are challenge, it's, it's a challenge and, and we know that, but, but I, I'm really impressed with the fact that actually it's how, and not if.

Jan: And what I've been reading a bit about, 'cause we had quite a disappointing COP in Baku and uh, felt like the government action and the inter-government action sort of has faded a bit. And there's, there's, there's issues and it will come back. But there's quite a bit of issues at the moment.

Some of the commentary I've read about that, um, from last year really did say, but the business is just carrying on. So, so the political thing might wax and wane, but businesses carrying this agenda forward and just, you know, getting on with it difficult though it is.

Katie: Absolutely, you know, it is something that we need to do and we need to be innovative in the way that we do that.

Jan: Yeah.

Katie: And it's going to take a collective amount of people to get there together and put aside some of our commercial competitive sort of thoughts and, and find a way of getting there as a, as a sector and help..gently nudge everybody else into this, into the same space and take some of the smaller people with us on that journey.

Paul: Well that's absolutely wonderful. Thank you very much Jane and Katie for sitting here with us and talking through, while in amongst your offices here at Booths. You've been very kind hosting us here, it's been a lovely atmosphere. Thank you very much.

Jane: You're very welcome.

Katie: Thank you for having us.

[Theme music]

Paul: Well, Jan, lots of things to think about when it comes to your next shop.

Jan: Indeed, exactly. That's what I was going to say to you is that I'm thinking about my shopping habits as they speak. I feel very guilty 'cause we pick up the bag with the three peppers in it. I mean, we do use the three peppers, but, but it made me think, yeah, actually, yeah, why am I doing that?

Paul: Yeah, just think plastic pepper packaging, it's very hard to say and it's very bad for the environment. [Jan laughs] That's, you know...

Jan: P, p, p, p, p. Yes.

Paul: P, p, p, p, p.

Jan: I have enough problem with PPIPL, but plastic pepper packaging, I can't do it. I can't do it. And how about you, Paul? What did, what did you think about your weekly shop out of that conversation?

Paul: I don't have a Booths near me, but I really love what they do when it comes to bringing your own clean plastic tupperware. Get your meat put in there. You're not getting the plastic bag wrapped around your meat, you're not getting that plastic because that particular type of plastic can be the kind of plastic that really is just thrown in the bin so often.

Even if you could technically wash it and put it in with the rest of the soft plastics that go to supermarkets, I'm gonna guess a lot of people don't do that, and that's an issue we've discussed all around consumer attitudes and behaviours with regards to PPIPL and how they treat them. And people sometimes might think that's, there's dirt, there's germs, there's ugh.

But if you're just putting it in your own plastic tupperware, of course you're gonna wash that and use that again.

Jan: Yeah, I suppose the other thing that really came through to me is like the, the. Detailed aspects and the planning and the data and all of the change that comes together for making a circular economy more of a reality, or at least a more circular economy, a reality.

So it's so, it's it's inspirational, but also technical. You have to do the work.

Paul: Yes. And we can see again, how it's not just one organisation in Booths. It ties in with so much else. They're talking about how they're looking to go further forward working with us here at Lancaster and Lancaster City Council, how they're working with their suppliers, how they're assessing attitudes of customers.

They can't just do it themselves, they, but they recognise how they need to work with all the other people to do it properly and to have that whole picture.

Jan: And the other wee magic link. I remember before Christmas we were talking to Katherine Ellsworth-Krebs about the work of a sustainability manager and their titles weren't, wasn't sustainability manager, you know, just like that.

Paul: No.

Jan: But they were doing the same work in terms of, they had different elements of that job that they're pushing forward.

Paul: I'm sure Katherine will be delighted to learn that Jane mentioned how they have a sustainability team...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...because when you go back to the, uh, episode we recorded with Katherine all about this, it's how quite often a sustainability team is one person.

And unless Jane was talking about herself as having many split personalities that do different jobs [Jan laughs] and thinking that there, there's more than one of her, it did very much sound like there was more than one person here. Which is, is good to see.

Jan: Yeah, absolutely. Well, that was very inspiring. So what, what's next Paul?

Paul: What is next Jan? Well, we've gone through the overarching PPIPL project. We've gone through supply chains and production of plastics. We've

gone through consumer behaviour and we've gone through the retail side of it. Now we're gonna be looking on waste management post-consumption, what happens to plastics after it's been used in packaging and how people deal with it.

Jan: Brilliant. I look forward to that.

Paul: Yes, we're gonna be having Dr. Clare Mumford from the PPIPL Project within Lancaster University and Richard Hudson from the CIWM.

Jan: What does CIWM stand for?

Paul: That's a good question, Jan, what does CIWM stand for? Well, it stands for the Chartered Institution of Wastes...please note the 's'...Management. And they've been part of the PPIPL project as well, They've been working with them, so we've got lots of practitioner involvement in that episode as well, albeit we'll actually to be back in the studio for that one.

[Theme music]

Jan: Brilliant.

Paul: Until then, thank you very much for listening. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]