

# SERVE Social Case Study for Installers/Contractors

Case study no.1

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Tipperary Energy Agency

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## Case study basic information:

Name of Contractor/company:

The name of the contractor/installer selected for the SERVE social case study No.1 is Mr. Mathew Collison.

Address/location:

Mr. Collison's company is **FPI Solar** and is based in Moneygall, Co Tipperary close to the SERVE catchment area.



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Moneygall  
Roscrea  
Co. Tipperary

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### **Short description of contractor/company:**

#### Type of company:

FPI Solar is a limited company. Mr. Collison's background is in electronics and electromechanical engineering and he is also a qualified Building Energy Rating (BER) Assessor. His business was established in 2005. Aside from Mathew there is one other employee.

#### Type of services offered:

Although the company name emphasises the 'solar' expertise of the enterprise, his business offers a 'one stop shop' for everything a home would need to go from a BER of 'G' or 'F', to a 'C' or 'B', including attic and wall insulation, heating controls upgrades, boiler replacements and the design, supply and installation of solar hot water systems. The physical process of attic and wall insulation is managed and supervised by FPI Solar but contracted to Munster Insulation. Currently the majority of the company's income is derived from work other than solar.

*'.....for the last three years of so most of our income comes from things other than solar so I'm actually in the process of re-branding at the moment'.*

#### Market coverage:

Moneygall can be seen in the bottom right hand corner of the map (below) adjacent to the lighter SERVE area. It can therefore be deemed a 'local' enterprise.



**Map of SERVE catchment.**

### **Level of engagement with SERVE project:**

FPI Solar was engaged in the retrofitting of houses in the wider SERVE area and this resulted in SERVE accounting for an estimated 50% of the business' income over the lifetime of the retrofit project, which has now ended.

*'It was an interesting project and it will be missed..... It is up to us now, to work on what aspects of the project can be replicated without SERVE.'*

## Opinion of the benefits of the SERVE project:

### Economic benefits for contractors:

For this contractor the most tangible benefit was economic, with an increase in business and income.

*‘...the phone ringing more often with people with a considerable grant offer in place.’*

### Economic benefits for the customer:

Expanding his opinion of the economic benefits, this time from the customer’s point of view, he stated that grants could cover maybe 50% of the customer’s outlay, making it an attractive proposition.

*‘Obviously they (the customers) were getting an additional amount of funding. They were also getting pretty good quality control, and those two together worked quite well from a customer’s perspective.’*

### Quality control and learning opportunities:

Mr Collison’s opinion is that the auditing of measures after an upgrade or retrofit, a feature of the SERVE project, was a driver for quality workmanship. For him the benefits of this auditing were twofold in that the customer had the assurance of quality work and the contractor was afforded new learning opportunities.

*‘All of us are capable of making mistakes but If it’s dealt with in time, and in a way that you know where you’ve gone wrong, and what you have to do to rectify it, you’re set up for the next time, it being*

*reasonable to expect that you won't continue making the same mistake'.*

Mr Collison's opinion is that installers involved with the SERVE project experienced a steep learning curve and that there was a consequent rise in the standard of work produced.

## **Opinion of issues/problems with the SERVE project:**

### Teething problems:

For his own part Mr. Collison did not express any problems or issues with the project aside from what he called 'some teething issues' that could be expected with a project that had not been attempted before. He did comment on the fact that he was aware of an initial phase of learning for both the project administrators as well as the contractors:

*'As a contractor I think you could see learning taking place on both sides'.*

### Complexity of engaging with SERVE:

Mr. Collison's impression of SERVE from the perspective of the customers is as a process which was initially dominated by paperwork and documentation which, in his opinion tends to 'block' some people from engaging further with the process.

*'I think that if you were to ask many customers what issue they had with the project it would be one of Perceived Complexity in engaging with it, and my guess is that the complexity was there.'*

He suggests that if something like the SERVE project were to be attempted again, the interface between the customer and the administering body be made as simple and foolproof as possible. If necessary adopting a model where only one form needs filling in by the customer, and where someone else does the remainder of the paperwork, this being more desirable than public disengagement with the project because of the required level of documentation.

*‘You’ll probably find some people who didn’t engage with the SERVE project because they couldn’t be arsed (bothered) going through the documentation.....it is a factor for some.’*

### **Opinion of homeowner’s knowledge of Energy Efficiency/Renewable energy technologies:**

Mr. Collison feels that by the time the customers made contact with him they had an understanding of what the upgrades they were receiving and what it would mean for their households. They may not have understood the technologies beyond a reasonable degree, but would have learned about them to a point at various seminars, public meetings and/or through discussions with Tipperary energy Agency staff or BER Assessors. It was not a case of first engagement with prospective customers.

*‘To be honest, as a contractor, I probably had the easiest engagement – at that stage their mind was made up, their funding was in place’*

### **Opinion of the future of RE/EE in the residential sector in Ireland:**

Planning for a future without incentives:

In the long term Mr. Collison envisages continually diminishing grant assistance and funding for energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades/retrofitting work.

Obviously, given his positive economic and learning experiences working on SERVE, he would like another project of that nature to occur, but realistically he doesn't expect that to happen. In fact Mr. Collison expresses his concern about the sector in general in light of the current government approach to grant funding through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Although he didn't expand on this point he said:

*'As I see it I need to plan for a future without incentives, I don't think they're going to happen.....I would be planning for a future without grant assistance whatsoever'.*

Mr. Collison's view on the drivers of current and future demand in the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy sector:

At the local (SERVE region) scale Mr. Collison hopes that interest/demand would grow from an appreciation and understanding of the benefits of the retrofits and upgrades through people simply visiting SERVE houses, experiencing the comfort and warmth and realising why they are so comfortable.

*'So hopefully – even though SERVE is gone – there will still be an after-effect of somebody going into one of those houses and realizing that 'Mary's farmhouse' is warmer than 'Kathleen's'.....looking at it that way, And then getting back to the 'Why?'*

Addressing the issue of demand more broadly:

Mr. Collison's assessment is that the current grant regime is not sufficient to motivate people to change their energy consumption patterns and technologies.

*'I think the current grant regime is not going to be significant enough to get people to make the step change.'*

In the future he foresees only very incremental change in demand in the sector and stated that something more imaginative is called for, although he did not expand on this point.

Mr. Collison speculated that a possible turnaround in demand may occur if international oil prices were to increase.

*‘Probably dearer oil prices – that will be the impetus instead of a grant; so if oil hits \$140 or \$200 per barrel, there might be more interest again.’*

Current grant funding could be better spent on Building regulation enforcement:

From a ‘higher order’ perspective, the wisdom of grant funding for retrofits in recently built houses is questioned in the light of lack of enforcement of current building regulations. Mr. Collison expressed serious concern and despair regarding the standards and quality of current house builds. His personal opinion is that:

*‘Current grant funding could be better spent in enforcement of existing building regulations, which is still a serious concern in that, even though we are only building five or six thousand units per year they are still, in my experience, being built badly and not up to the same standard as even some of the retrofitting work that we would have been doing.’*

## Overall satisfaction with the SERVE project:

Mr. Collison stated that his overall satisfaction with the project was high.

*'I'd see it as being very effective, easy to engage with and brought us all up to a better standard of work.....very satisfied – on a scale of one to ten it would probably be eight or nine.'*

As well as expressing his overall positive view of the SERVE project from a contractor's perspective he also offered his view or impression of the customer's level of satisfaction:

*'Great from the public's point of view..... (In) the houses in the area that have been upgraded my guess is you'll find a very big level of satisfaction.'*