Some of the team already had experience of trying to package wine in a sealed plastic glass: prior to 1995, DarbysOwn had sought to develop this format, and some of the original team still remained. In 1995, an entrepreneur had approached the team through an existing supplier. This individual had a developed glass and the machinery ready to produce this, but the tooling was not fully developed, and the entrepreneur could not get the glass to seal. Initially, there was some interest in the new format within the retailer, particularly as the portion sized wines sold in relatively small quantities, and hence were hand filled: meaning significant investments would not be required.

The packaging team was asked to examine the tooling, and question of enabling the glass to seal. Whilst they believed the issues could be overcome, the wine supplier and category manager decided that “the costs would be too high, particularly as a result of the need for tooling” [RA7]. The packaging team believed there was not sufficient interest within DarbysOwn for the project to succeed. The category manager, who was a “buyer by trade” [RA7], was concerned about the additional units costs of the new format. The team’s experience taught them that “for suppliers to be interested in a new type of packaging it needs to be advanced as something that works” [RA7]. The project was cancelled, despite good progress, hence they felt that “effectively the decision had been made almost regardless of our findings” [RA7].

In the case of the present project, there was a more significant push within DarbysOwn to make the idea work. The manager of the original project suggested that ideas were commonly rejected and later developed: “These things come up and down over a period of time…. [and] …may be successful based on the financial climate, current strategies, demand, and other factors” [RA7]. Hence changes sometimes took a great deal of time to become accepted.

The head of packaging innovation managed a small team, which began contacting suppliers and undertaking web searches to identify possible solutions. At this point, one manager was watching an episode of the television show ‘Dragons Den’, in which an entrepreneur was presenting the idea of a disposable wine glass to the ‘Dragons’. Whilst the idea was rejected on the programme, the head of packaging innovation immediately identified the French organization, and made contact. The team undertook research into the newly developed glass and seal, identifying that it had a more robust sealing and peeling mechanism, and larger flange. The cost was
also lower, which the category manager considered as key: as the “public will only pay a certain price for something” [RA6]. Eventually, after investigation, the team’s research resulted in the development of a similar technology with a UK supplier (Figure 8.2.4).

The project then progressed into the development process:

- Working samples/prototypes were produced and tested, based on the prior investigations. These were also reviewed in consumer research to ensure that the idea would be well received, and uncover any potential problems.
- Legal checks were carried out into safety, product life, and intellectual property.
- A small sample was produced by the supplier, then passed through the distribution chain to evaluate whether it filled, travelled, would work well in store, and identify any potential issues in the depot.
- Finally, a full depot trial was undertaken, where one depot was filled with the new glasses, and these were distributed to around ninety stores (as a test market). Data was then gathered to identify any issues or complaints.

Following on from this, approval was given for a full production ramp up and national launch.

Figure 8.2.4: Final Plastic Wine Glass launched into market

8.2.6 Project C: Development of a New Food Can

As part of their ongoing reviews of formats in use, the packaging team had undertaken research into the retailer’s products packaged in cans. The research
revealed: “Around fifty percent were in an ‘easy open’ can and the rest were in a normal [traditional] can” [RA2] This raised a question: “If an easy open can is better then why aren’t all products in this style of can, or if it is not better why are they in use at all?” [RA2] Indeed, the easy open cans cost around a penny more and carried added weight, impacting on other costs and the environment. The team considered that this warranted investigation, and a project was initiated (the process is summarised in Figure 8.2.5).

The team investigated the different options for opening cans which were currently available, identifying four options:

1. Traditional
2. Ring pull
3. Easy open (with ring pull and recess)
4. Foil lid

Research was subsequently undertaken with elderly consumers, utilizing two associated bodies to recruit consumers, as they were perceived as a key target market for DarbysOwn, and benefactor of this type of opening. Focus groups uncovered that ‘easy open’ cans were “not that easy to open, and many of these consumers did not have the dexterity to open the cans” [RA3]. Concurrently, the team also investigated consumer complaints and injuries, to identify any other issues. This led to the recognition that in the case of corned beef products, there was a particular issue, which had notably led to two customer injuries. The packaging team considered that injuries amounted to a key prompt that something needed to be changed, further informing the rationale for the investigation. These results were then discussed with the category manager, buyers and suppliers.