

Residential energy, THIS™, AI-designed materials and VR Shoes in this week's MaddyMoney

Every week, Maddyness brings you the latest investment news from the UK startup ecosystem. Here's a recap of this week's investments.

Temps de lecture : minute

21 June 2024

Total

£403.97M

Number of deals

9

Hometree partners with Barclays in £250M deal to accelerate green home improvements

Hometree, the fast-growing residential energy services company, has raised £250M of debt financing from Barclays to help homeowners finance the installation of solar panels, battery storage systems and heat pumps through a range of industry-leading lease and loan products.

The zero-deposit payment options are uniquely designed for the domestic renewable energy market and the plans feature system monitoring and repairs to help homeowners switch to green power with confidence. Many homeowners will even be able to “pay as they save”, with the forecasted savings they make through reduced energy bills exceeding their monthly payments from day one.

“Many homeowners naturally want to invest in renewable technologies but are put off by the extraordinarily high upfront costs. That’s why we’re focused on removing barriers to help more households take control of their energy bills and carbon emissions. We’re delighted to be working with Barclays to help us develop and scale flexible finance solutions with all-inclusive cover built-in, to enable homeowners to make the switch to clean, green energy with confidence.” Simon Phelan, Founder and CEO of Hometree

Kairos Group announces rebrand as NewGen and significant investment from BGF

Global media group, Kairos Group has rebranded as NewGen as the business secures a multi-million-pound investment from BGF, one of the largest and most experienced growth capital investors in the UK and Ireland.

Founded in 2015, Kairos Group is a leading social agency for brands and

creators, known for high-impact marketing campaigns targeting Gen Z and video gaming audiences.

The investment allows NewGen to further invest across its infrastructure, data, and technology platforms, driving new opportunities for growth and innovation across its services, intellectual property, and expertise within the creator economy.

“This rebrand and repositioning is the start of the next journey for the business.” Mike Craddock, CEO and co-founder of NewGen.

“As we venture into a new journey of the business, it felt only right that we partnered with people who shared our ambitious vision. Partnering with BGF was the natural alignment for us as BGF not only shared a lot of our values but when discussing the next steps for NewGen, BGF supported and believed in everything we wanted to achieve.”

Planet First Partners invests £20M in THIS™ to accelerate UK growth

UK plant-based food brand THIS™ has secured £20M in Series C funding from Planet First Partners. The investment, comprising primary and secondary financing, will support THIS™ in expanding its product range and boosting growth in the UK market. The growth strategy will be led by new CEO Mark Cuddigan, former CEO of Ella’s Kitchen. THIS™ aims to cater to evolving consumer health preferences and increase market share through new product launches and enhanced profitability of core products.

In 2023, THIS™ grew nearly 50% in revenue, becoming the third-largest meat alternative brand in the UK. Known for its hyper-realistic meat alternatives, such as THIS™ Isn't Pork Sausages and THIS™ Isn't Chicken Shawarma, the brand has strong repeat sales in major supermarkets. Recent operational improvements have consolidated production and enhanced gross margins.

Since 2019, THIS™ has raised approximately £35M from various investors. Planet First Partners' investment in THIS™ marks its first in the sustainable agriculture and food systems sector. The fund will take two seats on the board of THIS™ and adheres to strict sustainability guidelines under the European Union's Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR).

Highland Europe and AXA Venture Partners invest £55M in FINBOURNE Technology

FINBOURNE Technology has raised £55M in Series B funding, led by *Highland Europe* and *AXA Venture Partners (AVP)*. This follows a £15M Series A round in 2021 and will support FINBOURNE's global expansion, particularly in the US, UK, Ireland, Singapore, and Australia.

FINBOURNE provides cloud-native investment management solutions, including the SaaS-based LUSID platform, which offers front-to-back functionality for portfolio management, fund accounting, order management, compliance, and more. Their platform enhances data democratization and integrates AI and ML programming, transforming client operating models.

Highland Europe Partner Tony Zappala praised FINBOURNE's modern SaaS platform for its real-time visibility and decision-making capabilities. AVP General Partner Imran Akram highlighted the platform's ability to

integrate investment data across asset classes, essential for AI-driven efficiencies.

CuspAI secures £24M to combat climate change with AI-designed materials

CuspAI, a company using AI to create next-generation materials for sustainability and clean energy, has secured £24M in seed funding from leading European and US venture funds. The round was led by *Hoxton Ventures* with participation from *Basis Set Ventures* and *Lightspeed Venture Partners*. Additional investors include *LocalGlobe*, *Northzone*, and *Giant Ventures*, with prominent angel investors from *Google DeepMind* also participating.

CuspAI leverages generative AI, deep learning, and molecular simulation to design materials with specific properties on demand. A key focus is on carbon capture and storage, a technology critical for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Founded by AI pioneer *Professor Max Welling* and chemist *Dr. Chad Edwards*, CuspAI aims to revolutionise material design, making it as easy as a web search. *Geoffrey Hinton*, known as the 'Godfather of AI,' will serve as a board advisor.

The funding will support CuspAI's mission to use AI for designing precision materials to tackle global challenges.

RBW EV Cars secures £10M for global

expansion

RBW EV Cars, the UK's only manufacturer of new, hand-crafted British classic sports cars, has received a £10M investment from Meson Capital Partners. This funding will boost RBW's global marketing, manufacturing, operations, and sales. RBW is expanding its operations, including a new factory in Lichfield, England, employing 42 workers. The company is increasing production of its hand-built Roadsters and introducing the GT model later this year.

“This year is set to be one of the best in our history,” said CEO Peter Swain. “The new capital and rising demand for our classic British sports cars will help us expand globally.”

RBW's Roadster starts at \$135,000, with the GT model debuting later in 2024 at \$151,000. Customers can personalise their cars on the RBW website.

Echion raises £29M in Series B investment round

Echion Technologies, a leader in niobium-based, fast-charging battery materials, has secured £29M in Series B funding. The round was led by Volta Energy Technologies with participation from CBMM, BGF, and Cambridge Enterprise Ventures. The investment will help Echion commercialise its XNO® anode material for large-scale applications.

“This investment supports our goal to deliver the best fast-charging batteries for heavy-duty vehicles, aiding our full-scale commercialisation.”
CEO Jean de La Verpilliere

Volta CEO Dr. Jeff Chamberlain highlighted the potential of XNO® to improve battery performance and lower costs across various sectors. CBMM and BGF emphasised their continued support for Echion's innovative technology.

Echion's XNO® anode material allows lithium-ion batteries to charge in under ten minutes, maintain high energy densities at low temperatures, and deliver high power across over 10,000 cycles. Applications include electric and hybrid trains, mining trucks, e-buses, and industrial vehicles.

Freeaim raises £250K to boost R&D and scale production ahead of VR Shoes developer release

Freeaim, the start-up designing wearable tech for virtual reality, announces today the closing of a £250K pre-seed round. The round was led by *Nikolaus Oldendorff*, through the Oldendorff family office, part of a global shipping and maritime firm based in Germany.

Freeaim is subverting the status quo by developing wearable tech instead. Rather than requiring a large and expensive machine to move a person, Freeaim's omnidirectional motorised technology is built directly into the sole of its shoes.

These shoes require less hardware and material than treadmills, and can

go to market with a price point far more accessible in the rapidly growing VR industry. Easily stored in a box or carried in a backpack, the shoes can sync with any VR headset supported by SteamVR and will work with most PC VR games that have walkable environments. The VR Shoes feel more natural and stable, similar to walking on a gym treadmill, but in any direction while being immersed in VR .

SurrealDB raises £15.72M to disrupt database tech; introduces new cloud beta access

SurrealDB, the ultimate multi-model database, has announced a £15.72M investment round led by FirstMark and Georgian with participation from Crew Capital and Alumni Ventures.

A rapidly growing number of enterprises use SurrealDB to consolidate their databases into one multi-model platform. Due to its flexibility and simplifying approach, software developers are adopting multi-model databases to quickly adapt to different data requirements and reduce the need for multiple database systems.

With SurrealDB, developers can build modern, real-time apps faster and more affordably. It minimises the need for backend infrastructure management and complex API creation while offering flexibility across data models and cloud platforms.



In other investment news

Terra Invest, a groundbreaking investment firm launching in the City of London tomorrow, designed to bridge these critical gaps and empower UK's next big tech leaders.

Terra Invest takes a novel approach to its investment method, combining deep policy and regulatory expertise with financial acumen to solve the world's most pressing issues such as the growing demand for clean energy, AI Based solutions for financial services and healthcare distribution.

Through addressing a key point of failure that is currently stifling innovation across sectors such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain-powered financial technology and health & life sciences, Terra Invest aims to foster rapid growth and value while creating positive global impact.

In other international investment news

Rugby and Soccer Stars Antoine Dupont and Raphaël Varane Invest in MORFO

Star rugby player *Antoine Dupont* and international footballer *Raphaël Varane*, who has 93 caps for the French national team, have invested in the startup *MORFO*, a specialist in drone-based reforestation. This investment was organised by *Teampact Ventures*, a venture capital fund and existing shareholder in MORFO since November 2022. Other longstanding shareholders, *RAISE Seed For Good*, *Demeter*, and *AFI Ventures*, also increased their investments in this round.

Founded in 2021, the Franco-Brazilian company MORFO has quickly established itself as a key player in sustainable and large-scale reforestation. Using precise diagnostics of degraded areas, unique seed encapsulation technology, and innovative drone deployment, MORFO orchestrates ambitious reforestation projects.

Innovation is at the heart of MORFO's strategy: the company has developed two patented technologies crucial for regenerating forest ecosystems. These technologies enable efficient interventions over vast areas and in hard-to-reach locations, ensuring the reintroduction of 10 to 30 native plant species per project.



Read also

Athletes Raphaël Varane and Antoine Dupont invest in Morfo



Read also

French startup Morfo wants to reforest the equivalent of the surface area of Germany and Spain by 2050



Naomi Osaka and LeBron James' Hana Kuma secures investment from athlete investors at The Players Fund

The Players Fund, the UK's first athlete-led venture capital firm, has invested in *Hana Kuma*, the Emmy-nominated production company founded by *Naomi Osaka* and Stuart Duguid. They join other notable backers like LeBron James, Epic Games, Nike, and Fenway Sports Group.

Hana Kuma, known for projects like the Emmy-nominated *Mink*, Bloomberg's *Footsteps*, and the podcast *Good Trouble With Nick Kyrgios*, focuses on multicultural stories for a young audience.

Ruari Bell, Managing Partner at The Players Fund, emphasized the opportunity to tap into the Gen-Z market, while Fergus Bell noted the

potential for Hana Kuma to become a framework for diverse storytelling with support from their global network and partners like Epic Games, Nike, and LeBron James.

Proofs raises £2.04M from Earlybird Digital East Fund to launch AI Agents to fast-track proof-of-concept phase in software sales

Proofs, which uses AI agents to dramatically accelerate the proof-of-concept phase in software sales, has raised £2.04M in pre-seed financing. The round was led by Earlybird Digital East Fund with support from Expeditions Fund, Step Function Ventures, RTP Global, and a number of prominent angel investors. From today, customers can sign up to a private onboarding waitlist.

By using AI agents to build proof-of-concepts in minutes, Proofs is transforming the go-to-market strategy of software-based businesses and how products are built and sold. It is enabling the industry to transition from an unreliable hours-led approach - typical of the outsourced software solutions model - to a results-based incentive that aligns the goal of company and prospect.

The Proofs team is currently made up of a team of veteran software engineers and AI researchers. The funds will go towards product development, hiring new talent and preparing the GTM with a focus on mid-market, and enterprise customers in the US.

Ramify raises £9.3M to become the French

leader in premium wealth management

Ramify, a leading wealth management platform, has raised £9.3MM in a Series A round led by 13books Capital, with support from Fidelity International Strategic Ventures, Newfund, AG2R, and Crédit Agricole. This investment will help Ramify grow and become the top investment solution for affluent French investors.

Founded in 2021 by Olivier Herbout and Samy Ouardini, Ramify offers a comprehensive wealth management service targeting individuals with £84.5K to £4.22M in assets. The platform combines digitalisation, advisory services, and reduced fees, providing a wide range of financial products.

Ramify leverages AI and automation to offer personalised advice, while maintaining a human touch through its financial advisors. The upcoming transfer of over £8.45T in assets from European baby boomers presents a significant market opportunity.

Gracia AI secures £943K for diverse and immersive VR content creation tools

Led by Andrey Volodin and Georgii Vysotskii, Gracia AI combines AI innovation with deep industry expertise. The platform has already undergone successful trials with over 1,000 tech enthusiasts and initiated collaborations with notable artists like Elen Sheidlin and Sabina Bilenko.

Gracia AI addresses the critical need for diverse and immersive VR content creation tools. Their proprietary AI model enables rapid rendering of high-resolution volumetric videos, supporting real-time experiences on VR headsets. This technology offers unparalleled flexibility in post-production, allowing for dynamic camera angles and natural visual

effects.

Georgii Vysotskii, co-founder & CEO of Gracia AI, envisions their platform transforming the way users engage with spatial content, from virtual concerts to interactive educational experiences. Tipatat Chennavasin from The Venture Reality Fund highlights Gracia AI's potential to redefine digital capture and enhance user engagement in Spatial Computing.

Tinybird Secures £23.57M in Series B funding to expand real-time data analytics platform

Tinybird, the real-time data platform for data and engineering teams, has raised £23.57M in a Series B funding round led by *Balderton Capital* with participation from existing investors *CRV* and *Singular Ventures*.

Tinybird serves over a thousand businesses worldwide, enabling them to build applications ranging from user-facing dashboards to real-time analytics for fraud detection and inventory management. Customer testimonials underscore the platform's effectiveness in speeding up application development while reducing costs significantly.

Tinybird CEO *Jorge Gomez Sancha* highlighted the platform's impact on real-time data applications, noting significant reductions in query latencies and improvements in development efficiency. This transformation allows developers to deliver faster user experiences and more responsive applications, ultimately leading to increased customer satisfaction.

