

Case study: Be Renewable

Making light work of solar buyback

- *PassivPro solar monitoring platform maximises return on assets and reduces operational costs*
- *Legally watertight FiT transfer process shortens time to revenue*

With the feed-in tariff (FiT) payable for domestic systems at an all-time low in the UK, the rate of new installations has plummeted. As a result, the renewables industry is looking to new business models, like 'solar buyback', for sources of income.

"Our solar buyback scheme is simple," said Matt Coates, Business Development Manager at Be Renewable. "We're investing in existing installations where customers are looking to release some capital from their property, but want to continue to benefit from the free electricity generated by the PV array."

Be Renewable pays a cash lump sum to householders, the amount depending on the system size, quality, installation date and predicted yield. In return, Be Renewable will receive the FiT payment for the duration of the homeowner's agreement. The company also assumes responsibility for maintaining the PV system until ownership reverts to the homeowner at the end of the contract.

Optimising returns

As well as growing its own portfolio, Be Renewable acts as an agent for institutional investors, managing PV assets on their behalf. In total, Be Renewable currently manages over 3.6 GWh of rooftop PV assets. In addition to acting as an agent, the company also takes care of the operations and maintenance for larger firms' assets.

The financial success of the solar buyback business model depends on optimising the returns from all assets, while minimising operational costs.

"When we entered this market we knew that we would need to deploy some smart technology to make it workable," stated Matt. "As well as being able to remotely monitor every domestic system under our control, we also needed to ensure that we can transfer ownership from the householder as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Choosing the right partner

Matt knew PassivSystems well, having worked with them in a previous role. “PassivSystems has a reputation in the industry for providing excellent support, and that was my past experience when we rolled out thousands of their meters on PV systems for local authority properties. Given our new requirements at Be Renewables, I was confident they would be able to help me,” stated Matt.

To meet the needs of the emerging solar buyback market, PassivSystems worked closely with Matt and his team to add key features to its solar monitoring platform, PassivPro. The platform enables proactive management of solar PV portfolios to maximise yields and enable operators to efficiently maintain their assets.

One of the key requirements is for Matt’s team to be able to react quickly to identify and fix problems with underperforming assets. The platform allows them to set up automated alerts against customised KPIs to simultaneously monitor thousands of PV systems, which minimises the chance of losing valuable income on their PV investments.

Alongside automated monitoring, Be Renewable takes advantage of a portfolio of services offered by PassivSystems and its sister company arto.energy, which streamlines administration of the FiT, including licensee switching.

“One of the key benefits to us is that PassivSystems is a one-stop shop. We use their complete service so we don’t have to talk to different contacts for monitoring, FiTs processing, operations and maintenance and so on,” continued Matt. “We can use the system to store important documents acting as an asset register to identify the details investors need access to for legal compliance. We have access to auditable workflows, automated quarterly FiT processing, O&M ticket handling – all within the same platform.”

Switching licensees is a complex process. The existing licensee has to be informed that the FiT is moving, and on the day of the transfer an installer must visit the site to take the meter readings, switch the system over to a new meter and then someone has to notify the central FiT register, mortgage company and land registry.

“As well as removing a lot of the workload from our team, we probably save a few weeks of delay on each new system by using PassivSystems to streamline the process for us,” claimed Matt. “Solar buyback is a high volume, time-sensitive opportunity so for us to be able to save

that time and know that we are following a legally watertight process on every system we purchase is critical.”

“What’s also important to us is that the system is highly reliable and has an intuitive user interface so it’s easy to use, which means that we can process transfers faster. Home owners appreciate getting their money quicker, and investors like it because we minimise the potential for lost income, especially important in summer when systems are running at full tilt.”

“We can’t do everything on our own so the partnerships we build with companies like PassivSystems are critical to our business. We have a great relationship with PassivSystems; they are totally trustworthy and easy to do business with, which helps us to deliver a better service for our customers.”

About Be Renewable

Be Renewable, the renewable energy division of the Be Smart Group, installs and maintains solar systems from 1kWp to over 100kWp. It also offers an industry-leading solar buyback solution and works with investors to manage their solar assets on their behalf.

<http://www.thebesmartgroup.co.uk>