

The great 'free' solar panel hunt (or rent-a –roof) Part 1

I was first alerted to the possibility of 'free' solar pv panels sometime in May when my daughter told me they were being installed on the house she was lodging in. A quick internet search found the company who were operating in Barnsley, but unfortunately they were only fitting within a certain distance from the M1.

I had my ear to the ground, and it was in August that Tim heard an item on 'Today' on the radio about a firm called 'Homesun' who were looking for south-facing roofs on which to install PV panels. The deal was that the company gets the FITs, and the homeowner the use of electricity produced. There is no way of storing the electricity, but the homeowner's electricity bill would decrease. The company owns, maintains and insures the panels, which can be purchased at a later date (with depreciation factored in). The contract lasts for 25 years, which is the length of time the government has committed to paying that rate of FITs (inflation linked).

Not being in a position to buy a system, or wanting to take out costly loans, this seemed a good scheme to get in on.

I wasted no time in signing up online and 2 weeks later we received an email telling us a surveyor would be in touch with us. First to call was the newly- hired salesman, who gave us, what turned out to be, misleading answers to very clear questions, and we paid a £100 'returnable' deposit for the free system.

A surveyor visited a few days later who took measurements of the roof, inside and out, looked at our meters and took details about electricity supplier. His guess was that we wouldn't qualify for their 'free' system as they probably couldn't fit 16 panels on our roof. They had a smaller array, which we would have to purchase for £500 and pay £5 per month for them to service. It was this system they finally offered us by phone. There was an element of 'hard sell' in this telephone call, and there were things we weren't happy with in the 'leasing agreement' they had sent us. They gave us 7 days to deliberate.

Having done a pretty good job of 'energy saving' we, at present have an electricity bill of £20 per month. It could take us 8 years to break even, assuming a saving of £100 of our £240 annual electricity bill!

I turned down their offer, and only through using Consumer Direct online have I been able to get my so-called 'returnable deposit' returned. (By using the Misrepresentation Act). So beware! The market is new, and open to all. Homesun is not a member of REAL (Renewable energy assurance Ltd) scheme (unlike Isis), and does not mention The Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) in its literature. (Although its installers would have to be registered with them to get the FITs I believe)

I had also signed up with British Gas and ISIS months ago and heard nothing from either of them. I phoned British Gas, who made an appointment to come and do a survey – one month hence. This was followed by a letter from them, which was clearly for a home insulation visit and nothing to do with pv panels. A phone call confirmed that they don't know what they are doing or even who is doing it! I have yet to hear any more from them.

I phoned ISIS, who I had heard *nothing* from to be told our roof had been approved and we just had to wait for a contract! I was surprised not to have heard anything – not even an email confirming receipt of our online application! They said there were 'land registry issues' but we should receive a contract in the next month.

I have heard nothing since. Everyone was awaiting the outcome of the spending review, which threatened to affect the FITs, therefore these company's business plans! Those fears were not realised. So we see what happens next!

Anyone so gripped by this they want more can follow the money saving expert forum from this link!

<http://forums.moneysavingexpert.com/showthread.php?t=2637431&page=60>

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