

Pyworthy Solar: A network of lies and deceit OR Am I just a cynical Old Man?

An Open Letter to the residents of Pyworthy and Bridgerule

By

David Hillebrandt

In the last edition of the Pyworthy Post (337) I read an update on the progress of the Derril Water Solar industrial project. It stated “Remember, Derril water solar Park is Ripple Energy’s first exciting shared solar project in the UK. Members not only benefit from the clean energy that will be generated but actually own the project”.

As a local resident who had, for a variety of reasons, purchased one £25 share I was reassured that the future looked bright. Was I surprised when I had two E mails yesterday regarding the Solar Project? One was from Ripple energy to say they had “applied to be entered into administration”. Although not a financial expert even I know this means they have gone bankrupt and have no meaningful funds in their bank account. I have lost my £25! The second E mail was from an unnamed person calling himself/herself/itself the “Derril Water Chair” stating that the co-op was “looking to transition to a new managing agent”.

None of this surprised me. I may not understand high finance but I am not stupid and I had been expecting this from the day I purchased that £25 share in the Co-Op. In fact I had been expecting it from the day I first heard that RES had initiated the project. RES later morphed into Ripple who in turn became a Co-Op. What better way to break any trail of financial or environmental responsibility? We now have no idea who will be responsible for the eventual decommissioning of this potentially toxic industrial project when it becomes time expired in forty years time.

Thinking back over the last four years it is obvious that the residents of Pyworthy, the Torridge Councillors and possibly even the land owners have been consistently misled and lied to regarding this project. Is it coincidence that the original application took place during lockdown? Traffic surveys were undertaken when there was no traffic, short duration wildlife surveys were undertaken in the autumn, the original RES local liaison officer was not able to visit the area due to lockdown restrictions. One RES official spoke to me online in a condescending manner and when I suggested that it is rare to see sheep grazing under our other local RES owned solar panels. I was told it was normal practice and apparently the local farmers involved would be changing to farming sheep rather than milking cows.

You may remember the contempt shown to our community by one RES spokesperson who opted out of a liaison meeting in Pyworthy village hall with only 48 hours notice in August 2021 .

Some members of the Pyworthy Environmental Group (PEG) have detailed knowledge of the electricity industry. They raised the matter of a possible need for battery storage with RES in 2022 but this was dismissed and they were told this would not be needed. Now in 2025 we find RES are appealing against a decision by Torridge District Council to deny them planning permission for the very same battery storage units. A further attempt to industrialise this corner of rural Devon.

Ripple had been very keen to let the residents of both Pyworthy and Bridgerule know that they would be making large grants for local social projects via our Parish Councils. They even made an “educational” presentation to the children at Bridgerule primary school about the project. My simple mind fails to see how a now bankrupt business can make these promised grants but I hope I am wrong. Whatever the outcome for the grants at least the children of Bridgerule will learn a valuable lessons about the reality of any financial investment and the honesty and ethics of some businesses.

David Hillebrandt

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