

A close-up photograph of a beekeeper wearing a brown protective suit and a mesh veil. The beekeeper is holding a wooden frame filled with golden honeycomb. The background is a blurred green field. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Nature Recovery Ambition Statement Update 2024

19/02/2024

Foresight

Summary

Updated February 2024

One year on from the release of our [Nature Recovery Ambition Statement](#), this document gives an overview of Foresight's progress on nature positive actions from our Forestry team to our Solar funds. Set against the backdrop of the UN Biodiversity Conferences' (COP15) targets and The Taskforce on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)'s recently published [recommendations](#), Foresight continues to utilise its assets, to accelerate nature recovery.

1 Industry Collaboration

Collaborative industry wide engagement is how Foresight remains at the forefront of biodiversity targets whilst giving back to the spaces and places our investments impact.

Throughout the year Foresight teams contributed to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI)'s Nature Reference Group, the NCIA Biodiversity Credit Briefing and Discussion and the Green Finance Institute's TNFD Roundtable for Asset Managers, amongst other.

In September 2023 Foresight joined the UK Business Biodiversity Forum (UKBBF), an international working group that promotes best practice in integrating Biodiversity into strategy and TNFD implementation.

2 The Eden Project

Foresight continues its sustainability partnership with [The Eden Project](#), launching the inaugural Foresight Sustainability Conference onsite in Cornwall and building new resources to improve learning surrounding nature recovery.

2.1 Foresight Sustainability Forum

Hosted in April 2023 at The Eden Project in Cornwall, the conference brought together over fifty international leaders and investors from across the sustainability sector. With a keynote speech from Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP, sessions explored how cross sector collaboration can be used to mobilise conversations and better tackle the climate crisis.

One of the key debates during the Forum was on 'Nature versus Technology,' which can be viewed here: [Debate: Nature vs technology solutions - how do we tackle the climate crisis? - YouTube](#)

2.2 New Bioacoustic Monitors on Solar Sites

Foresight Solar Fund Limited (FSFL) has been collaborating with The Eden Project on a new initiative installing bioacoustic monitors on solar sites. These monitors provide an innovative way to remotely assess biodiversity on projects, providing continuous observation and data of sounds at the site. The data points can then be analysed, assessing factors such as, species diversity and interactions, population density, community structures and ecosystem functionality. In turn, these insights allow Foresight to design and implement new enhancements, improving biodiversity and promoting nature recovery at an asset level.



Figure 1. An example of a bioacoustic monitor.

3 Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company (FSF)

Foresight’s approach to forestry and afforestation delivers a range of natural capital services to society, with timber production being the primary provisioning service from our forests. Other outputs from Foresight’s holistic land design and management approach include regulatory and maintenance services (e.g., carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection and flooding defence for the built environment), alongside cultural services (e.g., recreation and education).



Figure 2. Afforestation at Shorthope.

Foresight Forestry is managed in line with the UK Forestry Standard (“UKFS”) guidelines and the Ecological Site Classification (“ESC”) decision support tool. These are guided by UK Forest Research, a globally respected organisation in silviculture and forest management practices. All established forest and woodland properties managed by Foresight are dual certified under Forest Stewardship Council (“FSC”) and Programme for Endorsement of Forestry Certification (“PEFC”) which are internationally recognised independent organisations. Meeting or exceeding guidelines and holding these dual certifications highlights Foresight’s ongoing commitment to implementing the highest sustainable forest management as a matter of standard practice.

Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company (“FSF”), Foresight’s flagship forestry and natural capital fund, has engaged with several experts and consultants to develop Biodiversity HAB-CON Alpha (“HAB-CON Alpha”). The tool combines the habitat type (under the UK Habitat Classification) and the condition of the habitats (poor, moderate or good) as the measure of health of land-based ecosystems. It addresses a number of issues that arise from use of other biodiversity measurement tools when measuring forestry and afforestation. HAB-CON Alpha will be used to complete a baselining exercise across the current portfolio of 65 forests and afforestation schemes and going forward, periodic re-measurement (versus baseline) will be carried out to study the impact of Foresight’s land management plans. FSF has a commitment to protect nature across the portfolio and our objective is to use the tool to provide management information that drives positive environmental practices in land management.

FSF has implemented six afforestation planting schemes with one further planting scheme from Foresight Inheritance Tax Solution (“ITS”). In total 1,130 hectares of new forest have been created and nearly 1.7 million trees planted. Foresight plants tree species combinations in a biodiverse way, with fifty percent of trees planted with a commercial focus, including Spruce, Norway Spruce, Noble Fir, Douglas Fir, Pacific Silver Fir and Scots Pine and a further thirteen percent of the area planted for biodiversity, carbon and landscape purposes. These include a variety of broadleaf species including Oaks, Alders, Willows, Chestnuts, Maple, Birch and Elm. A total of 13,400 rare and endangered trees have been planted, including Holm Oak, Black Poplar, Wild Service, Whitebeam, Small Leaved Lime, Large Leaved Lime, Norway Maple, Aspen, Crab Apple, Holly, Yew, Juniper and European Silver Fir. The variety of tree species demonstrates the forestry team’s efforts to consider and enhance the biodiversity of forests grown. There are further opportunities to enhance the remaining Open Ground areas that make up thirty seven percent of the newly created forests and these will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Foresight seeks to improve biodiversity across the portfolio and enhancements to Open Ground (e.g., grazing routines) could be instrumental in achieving this.

There are many positive initiatives across the afforestation sites that Foresight manages. At Upper Barr, for example, an afforestation site in Dumfries & Galloway in Scotland, FSF entered an innovative and market leading agreement with the Upper Urr Environmental Trust (“UUET”). Led by this community focused group, a parcel of unplanted land at Upper Barr is leased to the UUET and used by members of the community for non-commercial riparian reforestation, peatland restoration and other nature recovery projects. The agreement will last for 20-years, giving the community rights to develop these projects long term whilst working in partnership with FSF.

Foresight also manages other more ambitious nature recovery projects. FSF for example, has almost completed extensive baselining at its Fordie Estate site. This involves selecting a list of seven key indicators that are specific to the ecology at Fordie Estate and taking measurements at different locations to create a broad overview of the property’s wider habitat. The parameters chosen for this estate are UK habitats (and condition), higher plants, breeding birds, beetles, spiders, soil fungi and aquatic macro invertebrates. The

baseline data collection for these metrics will be completed by summer 2024. In the coming months and years, a number of interventions will be made, including but not limited to a large afforestation scheme (with a focus on broadleaves and native species), re-wetting of peatlands and wetlands, improvement of hedgerows, regenerative grazing and wildflower meadow creation, with the target of improving the ecology, biodiversity, hydrology and financial sustainability of the estate. Data collection tested against the baseline will then track the impacts of the land use changes and land management practices applied by Foresight.



Figure 3. Fordie Estate, where the baselining is taking place.

There is an exciting pipeline of projects that continue to be progressed, identifying and implementing new nature restoration opportunities where possible. Key species identified at various projects include butterflies, eagles and wading birds. Peatland restoration and regenerative grazing using specialist breeds of cattle will be key focuses at a number of projects, as will further restoration of existing wetlands. Future reports will include updates as the various projects progress and make advancements over time.

4 Foresight Infrastructure Biodiversity Baseline

4.1 Biodiversity Baseline

Foresight's Infrastructure division is progressing on its journey towards nature recovery, understanding how to quantify future potential for nature positive impact. This involves using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), a form of presenting and analysing geospatial data. GIS is the core discipline for understanding where Foresight's assets are geographically and examining their impact on nature and where new opportunities may lie.



Figure 4. An example of land use mapping from one of our UK Solar sites.

Foresight’s infrastructure investment teams are developing detailed scale maps of each site in the relevant fund. Having oversight of proprietary land use data allows Foresight to track all current or potential future biodiversity projects to continue to help industry wide collaboration in the push for nature recovery.

The first step is to create Shapefiles which digitally store the location, geometry and attribution of point, line and polygon features. The creation of Shapefiles requires an understanding of the site gained from technical diagrams, lease drawings and agreements, satellite imagery and in-person site visits and ground-truthing. Having understood where the site plan sits in the real world, boundaries can be drawn.



Figure 5. outlines the first two stages of Shapefile creation.

Ground-truthing involves visits to site to corroborate satellite imagery with real life observations. This technique proved instrumental in enhancing the precision of our baselining, exemplified by its successful application at the Sawmills Solar site. Visiting the site, the team were able to justify changing the ‘Modified Grassland’ categorisation to ‘Neutral Grassland’ and add beehives.

Foresight conducts ground-truthing on an app called ArcGIS to take geographically referenced notes and annotation and allow for accurate and easy amendments to be made to maps and Shapefiles. Photos are then taken alongside the notes and annotations to improve the accuracy of any necessary amendments and ecological labelling. Shapefile creation and geospatial data management has reached twenty five percent completion of the infrastructure portfolio in under just two months.



Figure 6. Images taken at the Sawmills site to evidence amendments.

The mapping is conducted in line with the [UKHab habitat index](#), which is used to identify different habitats across Foresight's assets in the UK. As we expand the analysis, the European sites will reflect the EUNIS Habitat Annex I directive and Australian sites the AUS WIP.

Through the mapping of the Infrastructure Portfolio using ArcGIS, we are generating quantifiable data to establish the groundwork for TNFD reporting, which mandates organisations to pinpoint nature-related impacts, risks, and dependencies.

5 Foresight Solar Fund Limited (FSFL)

5.1 Sandridge Solar Site

As one of FSFL's larger sites, Sandridge was chosen as a test case for possible new nature recovery schemes, which Foresight will look to roll out across the broader global portfolio. As a first step an ecological survey was taken to assess the readiness of the site, with analysis including:

- Examination of improved soil health that has arisen due to cessation of conventional agricultural practices
- Analyses of improved and unmanaged grassland across the site
- Detection of ancient woodland indicator species

The project also incorporated bioacoustic monitoring, bee farming, and wildflower planting. These mutually beneficial insights guide Foresight's teams in refining their approach to other sites and scale up these initiatives across multiple portfolios.



Figure 7. Images of FSFL's Sandridge site bee hives.

Alongside other projects, Sandridge is increasing its pollinator presence through a bee farming initiative. Bees are vital to agricultural production and play an active role helping plants grow and to produce food. Partnering with a local bee farmer, Foresight deployed 80 hives across eight strategically selected locations on the large site. Careful consideration was given to select these sites, addressing the proximity of neighbouring hives and nectar availability to give the hives the greatest chances of success.

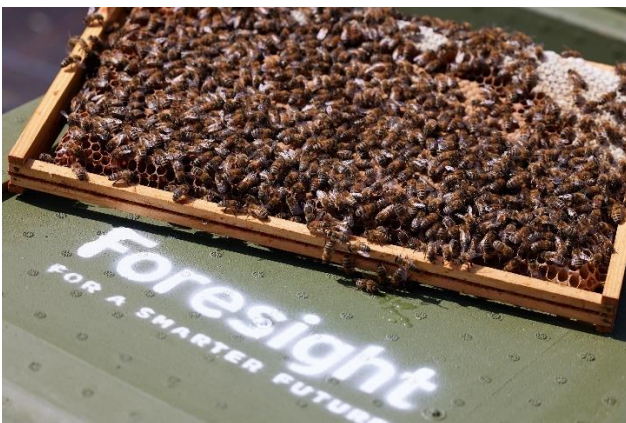


Figure 8. Images of FSFL's Sandridge site bee hives (Continued).

Other biodiversity measures Foresight Solar expects to introduce at these sites, including the planting of wildflowers, will also benefit increased pollinator presence. So far, honey production at some of FSFL's solar sites has improved as much as forty percent. Meanwhile, sale of the honey is concentrated in the areas near where it is harvested, generating additional localised economic benefit.

5.2 Kencot Hill Solar Farm

Foresight hired Clarkson & Woods, award winning ecological consultants, to carry out a monitoring report on Kencot between May and July 2023. This annual survey started when the site became fully operational in 2015 and will continue until 2025.

Published in November 2023, the report monitors three ecological features (the grassland botany, skylarks *alauda arvensis* and butterflies) and aims to assess their status within the operational solar farm. In addition, the general condition of the site, including state of the hedgerows, spread of any injurious weeds and the continued presence and condition of ecological enhancements is assessed.



Figure 9. a Yellowhammer stands on a panel and habitat log piles are implemented around the site.

Findings:

The botany of the site was found to be diverse, and the number of species recorded within quadrats in 2023 was 108, compared to 116 in 2021. A further 12 new species not previously recorded were identified, taking the total number of different species recorded since 2012 to 225.

The site appears to provide suitable habitat for skylarks and has previously supported both adults and young, however current use of the site is very limited. A change in grassland management is being considered to reduce the sward height which may encourage more skylarks to use the site.



Figure 10. A marbled white butterfly on a field scabious.

Overall butterfly abundance was above average, and diversity was consistent with recent years. The northern parcel continues to support both a greater abundance and diversity than the southern parcel. This is likely due to its greater size as well as the diversity of edge habitats. Suggestions of a butterfly transect route have been mapped and will be considered by FSFL.

5.3 Sawmills Solar Farm

Foresight conducts management plans on other solar sites around the UK, such as Sawmills solar farm in Devon, a site managed and owned by Foresight since 2018.

Sawmills farm falls within the UK range of the circl bunting, the UK's rarest farmland bird, found only along the south Devon coastline. To encourage this bird, hedgerows are managed to increase volume and density with a wild bird seed mix sown to provide seed through the winter months. These measures appear to have been successful, as circl buntings have been observed on site in three separate years during annual breeding bird surveys.

The site has also been successful in attracting other birds of conservation concern, including mistle and song thrushes, linnets, skylarks and yellowhammers. Overall, the number of birds observed at the site has increased 1.5 times since the solar farm was built.

Survey results from Sawmills demonstrates that with appropriate management, solar farms can benefit threatened species as well as more common wildlife.

5.4 Ecological report aggregation

Foresight is looking to employ Wychwood Biodiversity and Clarkson Woods to review the Foresight sites managed by Brighter Green Engineering (BGE) during spring/summer 2024, aggregating biodiversity management reports and data from the wider portfolio into a standardised format. Unifying this approach will create synergies and highlight best practice.

6 Frodsham Wind Farm Ecological Survey

Frodsham wind farm is a UK based onshore wind farm, forming part of the Foresight's ITS fund. In May 2023, Atmos Consultancy (a firm that has provided ecological surveys and support throughout Fordsham's development) referred to the positive relationship between wind farms and increased bird species. A trend that has been observed since the site's development and which demonstrates the importance of ecologically sensitive design, location and management.

[ITV News](#) showed support from a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) representative, calling for government to reinvigorate investment into onshore wind due to the far more significant threat climate change poses to bird species.

Atmos conducted the latest survey using sniffer dogs, a new more cost-effective approach approved by Natural England and recently adopted by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). The dogs are trained to support survey work for several species such as bats, great crested newts and bird carcass searches. The annual Atmos surveys are discussed with the Habitat Creation and Monitoring Group (HCMG) and based on outcomes proactive and habitat management is then agreed for the year.

The ecological monitoring has had materially positive financial implications for the site. Additionally, the study was able to prove the limited impact the wind farm has on bat species and their movement patterns. This evidence was submitted to the local planning authority, resulting in a significant reduction of the curtailment regime, facilitating potential site expansion and added generation of up to 3GWh each year.

The survey has demonstrated that nature positive outcomes can be achieved alongside decarbonisation efforts and financial returns.

7 Foresight Regenerative Farming

Regenerative agriculture is a series of impact farming principles and practices, aimed at promoting healthier farm ecosystems by restoring soil organic matter. Restoring soil organic matter helps remove carbon from the atmosphere and sequestering it in the ground improves biodiversity in the farms and surrounding areas.

In 2022 and 2023 Foresight invested in two UK-based regenerative agriculture projects, sponsored by agriculture specialist, Regenerate Outcomes. The initiative involved deploying capital across a number of farms in the UK to increase Foresight's natural capital activities across approximately 10,000ha with the scope to expand to 40,000 ha of farmland. The initiative involves several key stakeholders, including the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. Offering independent advisory services, the organisation helps farmers and land managers run profitable businesses, whilst protecting the environmental value of their land.

The project is driven primarily by the creation and sale of carbon credits, with a series of other positive outcomes being discussed as a part of its development. Some of which include, water catchment, peatland restoration and biodiversity enhancement. Beneficial changes from intensive monoculture farming practices are conducted through soil six core principles of regenerating soil which are: i) armour the soil from erosion with plant and plant residue; ii) maintain a diversity of living roots in the ground all year; iii) integrate livestock in order to bio-stimulate arable land; iv) enhance wildlife diversity and rebalance predator/prey ratios; v) limit physical and chemical disturbance to the soil and; vi) farm to context (social, financial and ecological).

The project is currently in its early stages and Foresight will provide updates on its regenerative farming practices as they develop and once baselines have been completed.

8 Looking Ahead

In partnership with The Eden Project, Foresight is currently preparing a first Solar Nature Recovery Blueprint. Launching this year, the blueprint will provide guidance to land managers on practical measures to assess, control and enhance nature and biodiversity across our solar sites.

Additionally, Foresight will host its second Sustainability Forum which will bring together instrumental players who are working towards a nature positive transition.

To view Foresight's Nature Ambition Statement [click here](#).

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