

Case Study: Boxted Airfield Solar Farm

The site

Boxted Airfield Solar Farm was built in 2015 on 20 hectares of former RAF land near to Colchester in Essex. It is one of eight exemplar sites where Wychwood Biodiversity is working with the owner NextEnergy Solar Fund and its investment advisor NextEnergy Capital. Our joint aim is to achieve a significant gain in biodiversity by creating native wildlife habitats. Investment in new habitats and careful land management has resulted in a demonstrable increase in fauna and flora across the site.



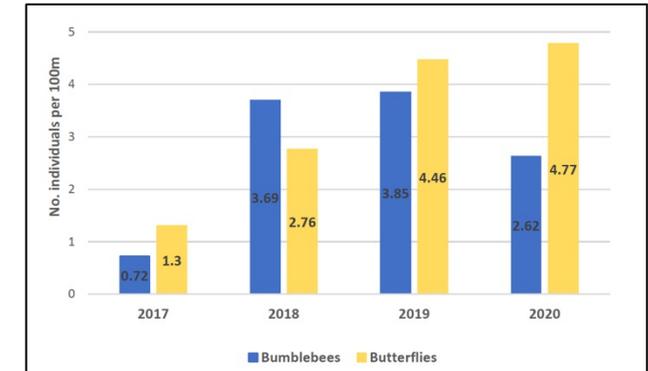
What we did

- Surveyed for wildlife to establish the baseline
- Agreed a Biodiversity Management Plan with NextEnergy and the landowner.
- Seeded five areas with clay tolerant wild flowers such as corn cockle, cornflower, marigold, red clover, bird's foot trefoil and yellow rattle
- Used small machines and seeded by hand to minimise disturbance and ensure good coverage.
- Built 2 large bug hotels from old pallets, building rubble and natural materials.



Positive land management

A light touch management approach has been adopted at Boxted Airfield Solar Farm. This means that wild flowers are left and encouraged to set seed before an annual cut. The land is then grazed by a local flock of sheep throughout the autumn and winter months, keeping the weeds down whilst maintaining agricultural production. The team at Wychwood Biodiversity carry out two survey visits a year to monitor the site and ensure that biodiverse habitats continue to flourish. Wychwood Biodiversity liaises with the asset management team at WiseEnergy and the grazer to help integrate biodiversity principles into the overall management of the site.



The evidence

- Annual monitoring results display a rapid increase in the diversity of botany, bumblebees and butterflies, as well as breeding birds. The graph above displays bumblebee and butterfly abundance.
- The colourful wild flower meadows showcase the wide diversity of plants that have been introduced to the site.
- Positive comments have been received from the local community, especially users of the neighbouring footpath.
- All eight exemplar sites are included in annual reporting to shareholders, as part of NextEnergy's commitment to delivering a net gain for biodiversity.