

Case Study: Enhancing Biodiversity at Southill, a Community Owned Solar Farm in Oxfordshire

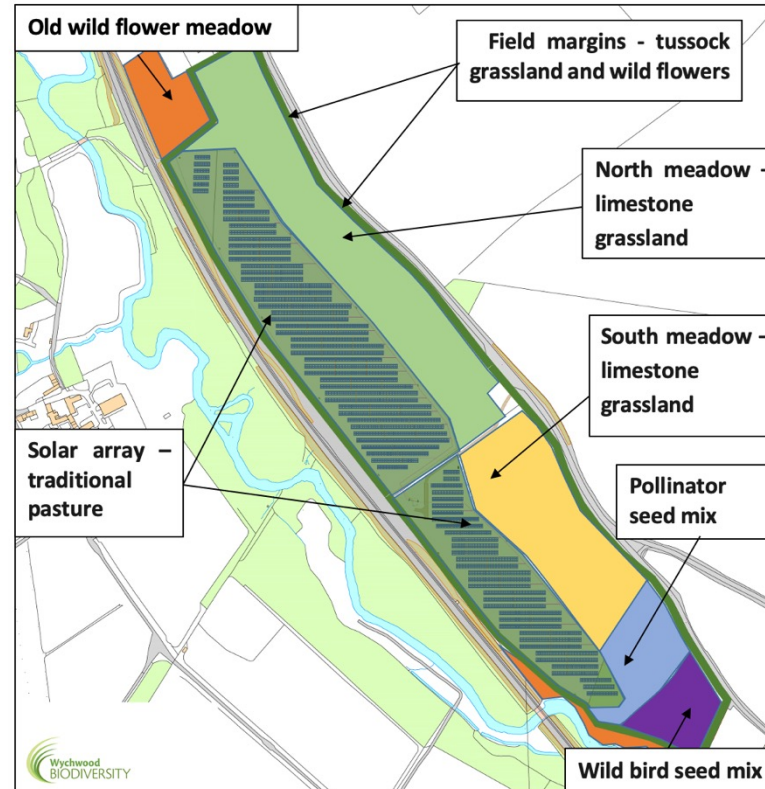
The site

Southill Solar Farm was built on 18 hectares of moderate grade arable land with generally low levels of biodiversity but with a small area of old wild flower meadow and some good hedgerows.

Wychwood Biodiversity worked with Southill Community Energy to develop an ambitious plan for the site with an aim of being the most biodiverse solar farm possible, creating a range of new grassland habitats while protecting and enhancing the old meadow and hedgerows.

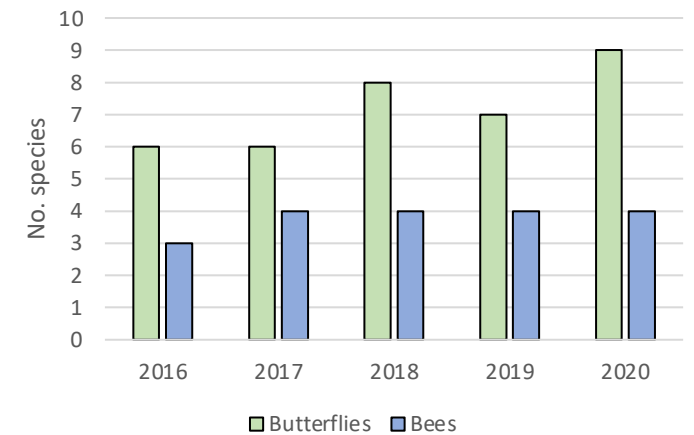
What we did

- Sowed eight hectares of limestone meadow with local chalk-loving wild flowers to attract bumblebees and butterflies and provide nesting habitat for skylarks.
- Created 6-metre-wide field margins of tussocky grassland and planted scrub as habitat for wintering and breeding birds.
- Planted new hedgerow as nesting and foraging habitat for a range of wildlife
- Created a community orchard with traditional tree species to provide fruits for wildlife and people.
- Planted a wild bird seed mix to feed birds such as the yellowhammer through the winter.



Community & partnerships

- We developed a Biodiversity Management Plan with input from community members and this was approved by the Local Planning Authority
- Community members and local conservation groups including the Wychwood Project and Glorious Cotswold Grasslands provided expertise on local wildlife and habitats.
- Volunteers contributed to tree, orchard and hedge planting events as well as regular weeding days.
- Wychwood Biodiversity managed contractors during the build and subsequently.



The evidence

- Every year, Wychwood Biodiversity surveys selected wildlife indicators to track changes over time.
- The monitoring shows an increase in the diversity of botany, bumblebees and butterflies (see above), as well as breeding birds.
- The diversity of plants has increased greatly since implementation as evidenced by the stunning wild flower meadows at Southill.