

FUTURE SCAPES

TWENTYTWENTYFIVE

by Lesley Lokko



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FUTURE SCAPES



WHAT DO YOU THINK LIFE WILL BE LIKE IN 2025?

FutureScapes is an exciting collaboration project that aims to explore the potential of technology and entertainment to create a better, more enjoyable world in 2025. It's not about predicting the future so much as imagining the possibilities. There is by definition an infinite number of possible futures ahead of us. But one thing is clear: the world of 2025 will be very different from the one we live in today.

By starting with life in 2025, rather than today, FutureScapes aims to stimulate more creative thinking about how technology might help us live sustainably. By sharing immersive and entertaining stimulus material – such as short stories – this collaboration aims to invite the contributions of ‘futures’ experts and an eclectic mix of thinkers, writers, designers and the public to address the opportunities and challenges of life in 2025 and the potential roles technology will play in it.

FutureScapes is designed to be as open and collaborative as possible and is being convened by leading sustainability non-profit organisation, Forum for the Future, and leading consumer technology company, Sony.

To find out more or to get involved visit www.sony.co.uk/futurescapes or follow us on Twitter @better_futures and #futurescapes.

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by Lesley Lokko

London, 25 May 2025

An early summer's evening. A slim, but heavily pregnant dark-haired woman sat at the window, looking out onto the garden. Birds were still chirping outside as the light slowly leached from the coral-coloured sky. It had been a warm spring – the roses bordering the path to the garden shed were already full and thickly perfumed. For the third year running, the English summer promised to be long and hot.

*Stacie Smalls and Hugo Hood
cordially invite you to celebrate their marriage
on Saturday, 7 June 2025
at St Mary's Church, Oldwood, Herefordshire*

Stacie Smalls turned the thick, heavily embossed card carefully over in her hands. Her fingers gently traced the shiny, raised lettering, delighting in the unfamiliar feel of paper, ink and card. She smiled. It had been her mum's idea to send out 'proper' invitations, as she called them, the old-fashioned way. Together they'd tracked down what seemed to be the last printer in the British Isles able to supply them, a man in Peebles, somewhere near Edinburgh. It had cost them an arm and a leg but, holding them now, it was worth it. She couldn't remember the last time she'd touched anything quite so lovely and solid. The edges were faintly crinkled, dusted with gold. She felt a sudden prick of tears. She was getting married. For the first time. At forty-nine.

'Lovely, aren't they?' Her mother's voice. She turned and looked up.

'Beautiful,' she murmured, smiling. She could hardly believe it was already here. It was to be a small wedding. Fifty guests, a mixture of his friends and hers, and her mother and brother, of course. Both of Hugo's parents had passed away and Stacie's father certainly wasn't invited. Eilidh, Hugo's sixteen-year-old daughter from his first marriage, was the only bridesmaid. She'd been in a tizzy of excitement ever since Hugo had let slip that he and Stacie were finally tying the knot. On account of the baby, he'd explained – a touch sheepishly, Stacie thought, amused. To Stacie's surprise, the other person whose excitement matched Eilidh's was her mother's. Odd, not just because Stacie and Hugo had been together for over ten years, but because her own marriage to Stacie's father had so spectacularly broken down after thirty. Stacie couldn't imagine Margaret getting excited over anything, let alone a wedding. The divorce was five years old; there were days when it seemed like yesterday. At least that's how it seemed to Margaret.



Lesley Lokko was born in Scotland and raised in Ghana. She trained as an architect, and built her own home in West Africa out of mud, but gave up architecture shortly thereafter to write sex and shopping novels (her words) full-time.

'Worth it, if you ask me,' Margaret said firmly.

'Mmm.'

'And they spelled your name right,' she added, peering over Stacie's shoulder.

Stacie smiled again. S. T. A. C. I. E. Not Stacy with a 'y', the way it was commonly spelled. She'd been correcting people since she was a child, which was quite a long time. You'd have thought she'd be tired of it by now, but she wasn't. Stacie Smalls. It was a funny name for a barrister but it always got her a smile from the jury, which often helped. 'What d'you think, Mum?' she asked, looking up at her. 'Hugo Smalls sounds better than Hugo Hood, doesn't it?'

Her mother pulled a face. 'Don't tell me you're going to do that too?' she asked in alarm.

'What?'

'He can't change his name,' Margaret protested. 'It doesn't seem right.'

'Oh, Mum.' Stacie only just managed not to roll her eyes. 'We've been through this a hundred times. I want the baby to have our name. The same name.'

'It doesn't seem natural,' Margaret sniffed.

Stacie suppressed another irritated sigh. There were so many things that Margaret Smalls deemed 'unnatural' these days that she was having a hard time keeping up. The baby was just one of them. 'At your age?' had been Margaret's first, shocked response.

'What's wrong with my age?'

'You're nearly fifty!'

'So? You can have a baby at any age.'

'It's not right.'

'Mum . . . I thought you'd be pleased for me,' Stacie said, both stung and bewildered. Her brother Toby had spectacularly failed to produce grandchildren – surely the prospect of being a grandmother ought to have outweighed Margaret's curiously old-fashioned concerns. After all, she'd had Stacie when she was in her late thirties. In 1976 that was considered positively ancient for a first-time mother, or so Margaret had always said.

'It's just . . .'

'Just what?'

But Margaret had been unable to elaborate.

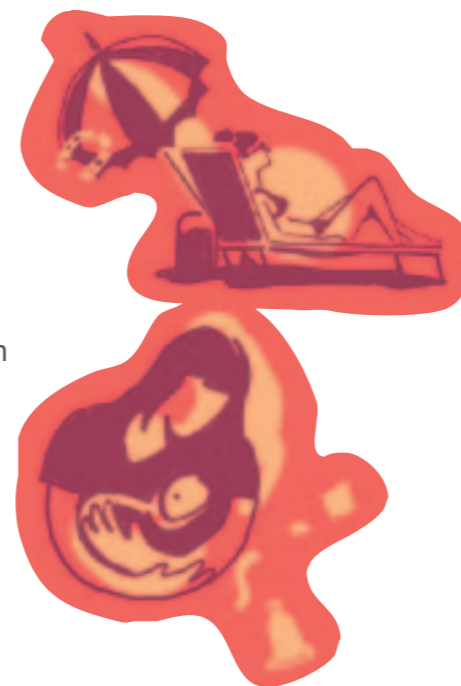
'Look, it's up to Hugo,' Stacie said now, hoping her voice was firm. 'I'm not changing my name. I can't. I've got the chambers to think of. It'd be too confusing.'

'Well,' Margaret harrumphed, 'don't say I didn't warn you.' She sat down on the sofa opposite and picked up the remote. The giant TV screen flickered on and the show she'd been watching swam into view. She slipped on her headphones and disappeared into the ether. For someone who moaned daily about being bewildered by the modern world, Margaret had adapted remarkably well. She was addicted to Talking Books, a daily TV show that not only told people like Margaret what books were worth downloading but read them out loud too. At eighty-six, her eyesight was fading and arthritis made holding the tablet difficult. Talking Books was the perfect solution.

Stacie glanced over at the silent screen. Was that really Davina McCall? It was. Unbelievable. She hardly looked a day older than forty and she had to be nearly sixty now. She grinned to herself. Her mother had it all wrong. Things were so much better for women nowadays, not worse. Aside from all the wonderful medical advances that people like her took for granted, there were all sorts of other benefits that made the job of being a woman so much easier.

Stacie had had it easy, as Margaret was only too quick to remind her. Things were different in her day. Margaret was a miner's daughter, from Snaresborough, and hadn't gone to university like Stacie and all her friends had. A miner. The thought made Stacie smile. It seemed a job from another age. It was. Burrowing under the earth to dig up its resources was unthinkable now. She'd never even seen a lump of coal. The very idea of it seemed, well, dirty. Energy was clean these days, literally. Wind, water, waves . . . those gigantic, neat lines of white windmills that dotted the coast of England like a fence – it seemed a small price to pay for making sure no one ever had to go underground again. She'd never met her grandfather; he'd died before she was born, but Margaret often spoke of him. Especially after all that business with her father. Her grandfather would never have done what Jack Smalls did.

She looked over again at her mother, now lost completely in whatever book it was Davina was reading. Her mother had the widest reading tastes of anyone Stacie knew – Tolstoy, Turgenev, Grisham, Keyes and pretty much everything in between. Born in 1939 on the eve of World War II, she'd always worked, despite never having had a proper 'profession', like Stacie. Stacie and Toby were of the generation the newspapers called 'latch-key kids', letting themselves in after school, making their own tea – or 'supper', as Margaret preferred to call it – doing their own



homework. Margaret and Jack, determined to give their children all the opportunities they'd been denied, worked hard. It took two salaries and all the hours God sent to manage it.

Private schools, a nice big house in Richmond with a big garden and holidays in the sun twice a year. Stacie couldn't recall ever minding the fact that they didn't see their parents often. She didn't know anyone whose parents didn't both work. And in any case, she and Toby were in boarding school most of the year . . . she'd have liked to see more of Dad, perhaps, and now that everything was out in the open and it was clear why she hadn't, she understood why her mother was still so bitter about it. But, she tried to reassure Margaret, it was hard to miss something you'd never really had. Margaret wasn't convinced.

Her glance fell on the little table beside her. Her ID was lying face down, blinking its lovely, turquoise light. She picked it up and turned it over. Hugo's face slowly crystallised in front of her. She smiled.

'Hello you,' she said, placing a hand protectively on the high, hard mound of her stomach. 'How're you?'

'Knackered,' he laughed. 'How's baby?' He could see her hand going round and round.

'Kicking away. How was the meeting?' He was in Shanghai for the final handshake on a deal that he and his colleagues had been working on for almost two years. He often joked about the way business was done these days – he and Cliff could spend weeks and months talking to people on the other side of the world without ever seeing them in the flesh. They negotiated, argued, laughed, shouted and got to know one another for months on end, but when the deal was ready, everyone still insisted on a handshake, especially the Chinese. It appealed to their old-fashioned sense of etiquette and since much of the world's economy depended on them, a trip to Shanghai or Beijing was usually the end result.

'Nearly there. One last signature and then we're done.' He looked tired, she noticed. She pressed 'P'. The screen widened to take in the panorama around him. Cliff was sitting next to him, fiddling with his own ID. He was probably talking to Janet, his wife. The hotel bar looked lovely – all twinkling lights and, in the distance, a shimmering pool that appeared to float out over the spectacularly lit-up city. It was nearly midnight in Shanghai. She tapped the screen again and the statistics immediately flowed across it. *36°C, mostly cloudy, wind N at 14mph, humidity 70%.*

'Thirty-six degrees,' she smiled. 'It's nearly midnight!'

'You should've been here this afternoon. It was over forty.'

'Well, it's pretty warm here. Mum's fallen asleep again. She can't take the heat.'

'Did you check what the weather's going to be like on the seventh?'

'No, I forgot. Hang on a minute . . .' She quickly scrolled across to the calendar on her screen. *Saturday, 7 June 2025. Sunrise: 04:45. Sunset: 21:14. Temp: 24°C, sunny, wind SE at 3mph, humidity 54%.* She read the stats aloud. 'Sounds perfect, doesn't it?'

'Well, that's why we chose it, remember?'

'I know. I keep forgetting. Who's that next to Cliff?' she asked. He'd put down his ID and was talking to a woman with long blonde hair perched on the stool next to him. *Perfume: Miss Dior.* The sensors in Hugo's ID picked up the woman's scent, transmitting the data thousands of miles away to where Stacie sat, listening to her mother gently snore.

'Dunno. Some woman he met yesterday.'

'Oh.'

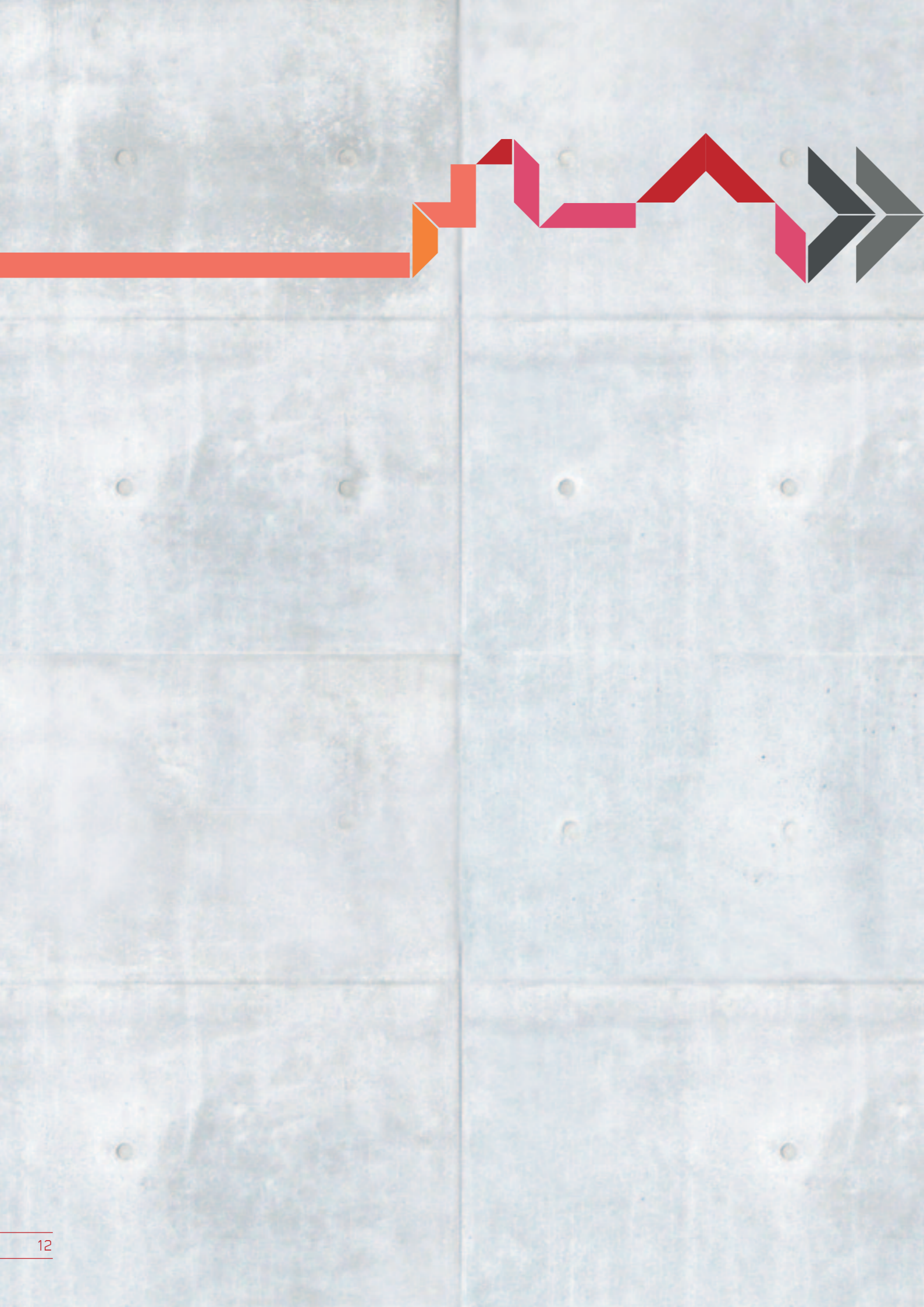
'Now, now,' Hugo laughed teasingly. 'Don't start, darling. I'd better go. We're up early tomorrow morning. Let me kiss the bump.'

She tilted the ID towards her stomach. 'Hurry up and come home,' she said, listening to his loud 'mwah!' fill the air. 'We miss you.'

'Miss you too, darling. I'll call you tomorrow. Love you.'

'Me too.' There was a soft 'ping' as his image faded from the screen. She looked at the blank surface for a few seconds, fingers hovering. Should she . . . ? Pam, her best friend, had installed Trax on it only a couple of weeks ago. It was the most brilliant app – designed by a woman, of course. It used the phone's GPS system to track the owner's movements without them even being aware of it and – this was the really genius part – without the ID even being switched on. Tiny sensors could send back all sorts of data: the sound of conversation, body temperature, the scent of alcohol in the air, perfume . . . all the usual stuff that would tell you who someone was with, what they were doing, where they were . . . right down to the last centimetre. Gone were the days when you sat at home wondering where your partner was or who they were with, or indeed, if they were really where they said they were. If Trax had been available when Jack Smalls had been around . . . well, things might have turned out very differently. At least Margaret wouldn't have suffered the indignity of being lied to – and for nearly twenty years, too. And by her best friend. No wonder she was still so bitter. Another family, for twenty years, living on the other side of the city.

Stacie's fingers were still itching to double-tap onto Trax. No, she shouldn't. She had absolutely no reason to follow Hugo's movements or doubt him in any way. He'd always been scrupulously honest with her; she'd never mistrusted him, ever. She wasn't even sure why she'd let Pam install Trax in the first place. Sure, it



About Sony

Sony is a leading global innovator of audio, video, communications and information technology products for both the consumer and professional markets. Offering a complete end-to-end HD value chain and with its electronics, music, pictures, game and online businesses, Sony is one of the world's leading digital entertainment brands, employing approximately 170,000 people worldwide.

Sony recognise that our businesses have a direct and indirect impact on the societies in which we operate and we see sustainability as a critical part of our company ethos and activities. Our partnerships with NGOs such as WWF, UNICEF and Save the Children ensure we play our part as a responsible global company. Our "Road to Zero" global environmental plan sets out a long-term goal of achieving a zero environmental footprint (through curbing climate change, resource conservation, control of chemical substances and biodiversity) throughout the life cycle of our products and business activities by 2050, as well as specific mid-term targets in line with that goal.

Sony believes that technology can make a positive contribution to tackling social and environmental issues, both today and in 2025. We have a strong track record in open innovation for sustainability with our Forest Guard and Open Planet Ideas initiatives.

Sony's role in FutureScapes is to use our brand's reach and our expertise in technology, imagination and innovation to engage the widest possible audience in an open collaboration to help everyone better understand – and innovate for – an uncertain future.

To find out more about our corporate sustainability activities, visit: www.sony.co.uk/eco

About Forum for the Future

Forum for the Future is a non-profit organisation working globally with business and government to create a sustainable future. We have 15 years experience inspiring new thinking, building creative partnerships and developing practical innovations to change our world. Our aim is to transform the critical systems that we all depend on, such as food, energy and finance, to make them fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Forum works with more than 100 partners across business and the public sector. We specialise in a 'system innovation' approach to sustainability and use powerful tools such as 'futures', innovation and sustainable business model development to help companies succeed. We communicate and share our thinking and tools widely, including running a Masters course for future leaders and publishing the leading magazine on environmental solutions and sustainable futures, Green Futures.

Forum for the Future's role in FutureScapes is to design and deliver the futures process and provide sustainability expertise.

www.forumforthefuture.org

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