

# Hedgerow management policy

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# Policy statement

Tewkesbury Borough Council is responsible for managing a large network of hedgerows situated on its land. The council will manage its current hedgerows to; minimise any risk to people and to any surrounding buildings and properties, and to enhance and improve the natural environment. This policy document will ensure that a consistent and structured approach is taken in the management of the council's hedgerows.

The council believes that hedgerows play a vital role in; improving the aesthetics of the borough, combatting climate change, aiding in flood mitigation, absorption of noise and particulate pollution, act as corridors for wildlife to utilise, and create a diverse habitat for a variety of wildflowers, insects, birds and mammals.

## 1. Introduction

There are currently over 390,000km of hedgerows on field boundaries across England. The south-west is responsible for 24% of this total. Nearly half of all of Britain's hedgerows were lost between 1940 and 1990, predominantly due to agricultural intensification and expansion. Despite the rate of loss slowing, neglect, damage, and removal of hedgerows are still impacting this rich and valuable resource.

The UK Government has set ambitious targets for hedgerow creation and restoration, setting a goal of creating or restoring 48,000km by 2037 and 72,000km by 2050; all of which is to help hit the target of making agriculture carbon neutral by 2050<sup>i</sup>.

Hedgerows play a vital role in the rural landscape and offer many benefits to both local and wider reaching areas. As well as providing an important habitat to support an abundance of wildlife, hedgerows can; capture carbon, provide wood fuel, provide shelter and shade, prevent soil loss, reduce flooding, filter pollutants from runoff, and improve air quality.

### 1.2 Legal protections

Hedgerows in England and Wales have legal protections preventing removal of 'important' hedgerows. 'Important' hedgerows are considered such if they meet requirements in The Hedgerow Regulations 1997, which can be found [here](#)<sup>ii</sup>. In 2024, England's hedgerows received further protection and additional management guidance in '[The Management of Hedgerows \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)'<sup>iii</sup>.

If a hedgerow, or part of a hedgerow is being considered for removal, a hedgerow removal notice should be submitted. Applications can be made online via the planning portal website, found [here](#).

Furthermore, [part 8 of the anti-social behaviour act](#)<sup>iv</sup> gives councils powers to deal with formal complaints about high hedges. The legislation makes it clear that a council can only become involved once all attempts at negotiation have been exhausted.

For trees to be considered a “high hedge” they must be:

- made up of a row of two or more trees
- more than two meters in height
- evergreen or semi-evergreen
- growing on land owned by someone else

If any of the above apply, a formal complaint can be made to Tewkesbury Borough Council, under the high hedges legislation as set out in Part 8 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003. Your complaint will be considered using standard government guidance set out in a document called hedge height and light loss. If your complaint is successful, Tewkesbury Borough Council will determine an action height to which the height of the hedge must be reduced.

A fee of £500 or £100 to benefit recipients, must be paid by the person making the high hedge complaint.

Before making a formal complaint, you must have taken all reasonable steps to try to settle your dispute. It is always better to settle a dispute about trees amicably and it is recommended that you try to resolve it by talking to your neighbours first.

### 1.3 Climate change and hedgerows

Hedgerows are considered a low risk of climate change impacts according to Natural England<sup>v</sup>, but a summary of the risks and potential impacts can be found in Table 1.

Cause	Consequence	Potential impacts
Increased annual average temperature	Longer growing season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased growth, leading to greater management requirements and an enhanced threat of abandonment</li><li>• Increased shading of hedgerow herbaceous flora</li><li>• Changing composition of wildlife in hedgerows</li></ul>

Warmer winters	Fewer frost events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The winter chill requirements of berry species may not be met. Reduced bud, flower and fruit production will affect food resources for wildlife</li> </ul>
Drier summers	Drought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased mortality and die-back of certain hedgerow tree species, such as beech in the south-east of its range. Drought stress will increase trees' susceptibility to pests and diseases</li> </ul>
Wetter winters	Flooding Water logging of soils Erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wood species exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season will be at risk of dying</li> <li>The winter trimming of hedgerows will become more difficult in some areas due to wet ground conditions. Winter trimming is preferred to autumn trimming to ensure berries and fruits are available for birds and other species</li> <li>Wet soil conditions could cause damage to soil structure, leading to increased die-back of hedgerow trees</li> </ul>
Increase in storm frequency	High winds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of mature and veteran hedgerow trees</li> </ul>
In combination	Changing patterns of agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased offsite impacts such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment</li> <li>Re-intensification leading to a reduction in the use of bigger strips and margins to protect adjacent hedges</li> </ul>
	Increased occurrence of insect pests and pathogens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential loss or significant reduction in populations of key hedgerow tree species</li> </ul>

Table 1. Natural England's assessment of how climate change may affect hedgerows

## 1.4 Biodiversity

The Tree Council have provided invaluable information regarding the importance of hedgerows, as well as information about planting and maintaining hedgerows – this can be found [here](#)<sup>vi</sup>. Proposals for planting new lengths of hedgerow should follow the same guidance as set out in Figure 3. It is important that the area is deemed suitable for new planting, as ample space is required if a fully functioning hedgerow is to flourish.

There have been 130 priority Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species known to be significantly associated with hedgerows, including their trees, banks, basal flora and immediate margins. While few of these species are dependent on hedgerows alone, the loss of hedgerows (or a decline in their quality) would likely have an adverse effect on their populations.

There are many threatened species associated with hedgerows, which include 10 species of lichen, 72 species of invertebrates, 5 species of reptiles and amphibians, 20 species of birds and 11 species of mammals<sup>vii</sup>.

There are a number of species which do not like to travel across open ground, like insects such as butterflies and bumblebees, mammals such as dormice and weasels, as well as birds such as several species of tits: hedgerows create a perfect conduit for their movement between habitats.

## 2. Ecosystem Services

Hedgerows have a variety of benefits reaching beyond biodiversity and habitat enhancement:

### 2.1 Carbon capture

Hedgerows sequester carbon at twice the rate of woodland, due to their three-dimensional linear structure, and the current hedgerow network in Britain is thought to store 9 million tonnes of carbon; valued at £65 million (at base carbon rates)<sup>viii</sup>.

### 2.2 Wood fuel

Many modern hedges are managed by flailing; an expensive and untargeted approach which will often damage hedgerows and reduce their longevity. Managing hedgerows through coppicing can be a cheaper management technique depending on the specific conditions and locations of the hedgerow, with the additional benefit of providing wood fuel which can be sold to local communities and aid in alleviating fuel poverty<sup>x</sup>. The burning of this wood is offset by the continual growth and regeneration of the hedgerow and acts as a carbon neutral activity.

### 2.3 Shelter and shade

Hedgerows can act as direct buffers against the sun, as well as against the wind. Hedges are effective at reducing windspeeds over a distance 4x their height upwind and 8x their height downwind. They are deemed better windbreaks than walls as they still allow some air to flow through them, preventing turbulence and downdrafts<sup>x</sup>. This can aid in improving crop success in adjacent fields.

## 2.4 Prevention of soil loss

Hedgerows reduce surface wind speeds and their roots and lower growth act as a barrier to water runoff while stabilising the soil surface<sup>xi</sup>.

## 2.5 Flood alleviation

Hedgerows designed with banks and ditches can act as both a physical barrier, which slows flood water and reduces the flow towards rivers and streams, but their root systems also increase absorption rates of water. Over time, hedgerows will reduce surface runoff from fields, which often leads to silted waterways, making them more prone to flood events (due to less room for water).

## 2.6 Filtration of pollutants

Hedgerows reduce the amount of polluting fertilisers, pesticides and sediment that reach watercourses through acting as a physical barrier, through increasing infiltration into the ground, and through nutrients being recycled by the trees, shrubs and other plants. Any gaps/ditches/drainage pipes through the hedge will render it unsuitable for this purpose.

## 2.7 Improve air quality

Urban hedges can be more effective at removing pollutants (such as particulates) out of the air, and more often than trees, at a human height. Urban centres with only large trees can often keep harmful pollutants below them, nearer to humans.

# 3. Planting and management

## 3.1 Management of current hedgerows

Currently, Tewkesbury Borough Council contracts its hedgerow maintenance works to Ubico to conduct each year, between the months of October to March. Current management of hedgerows is limited to a scheduled yearly cutting regime; year 1 is a hard cut, year 2 a lesser cut, year 3 a hard

cut. This is a very limited technique, but with current data and resources available, it is the most suitable method.

Tewkesbury Borough Council will collect an accurate dataset of its hedgerow assets to provide more nuanced and specific management for individual hedgerows throughout the borough for the winter works program of 2025/2026.

Work will be contracted out, depending on which maintenance is required, to ensure that hedgerows are managed with appropriate techniques for specific circumstances. For example, hawthorn hedges have long been over-managed; since laying became too expensive, they have been hard cut to similar heights each year, which has resulted in slow but inevitable declines in condition. With new data, the council will be able to specifically target hedgerows in poor condition, and alter their management accordingly; by allowing extra growth each year, it will enable the hedgerow to begin to recover and will facilitate new, healthy growth.

Within council owned or managed parks and gardens, it is recognised that hedges running alongside commonly used public rights of way need to be maintained such that they do not interfere with the public using footpaths etc. This will aid in reducing complaints from members of public that hedges are snagging on clothing or scratching.

In addition to this, nesting birds are of particular importance. In the UK, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) protects nesting birds. All wild bird species, their eggs and nests are protected by law. All works to suitable habitat including trees, shrubs and woodland must always try to avoid harming birds or to use measures which do not kill or injure them before considering taking harmful action. Timings of works should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (generally considered to be between March – August inclusive, however this is not defined by law and a number of species are known to nest outside of this time). If works are undertaken during the nesting bird season, the trees, shrubs and/or woodland should be inspected by a suitable qualified and experienced ecologist prior to the work commencing. If an active nest is identified, a no works buffer should be installed around the nest until the nest is no longer active, or the chicks have fledged, as confirmed by the ecologist.

## 3.2 Planting new hedgerows

Where suitable and practical, the planting of new hedgerows should be encouraged by Tewkesbury Borough Council. The Tree Council provides an excellent overview of where to plant and where not to plant new hedgerows<sup>xii</sup>.

New hedges are best placed when they:

- Fill in larger gaps (>10m wide), although this is not a minimum requirement
- Contour slopes or border water courses
- Create green lanes, whereby they run parallel a road or track
- Restore historic field patterns
- Improve air quality by being planted in urban areas
- Border allotments, school or college grounds, edges of parks, gardens or public footpaths

There are some circumstances where the planting of hedgerows is not encouraged, which are when they:

- Cross wildlife habitats, such as wildflower meadows or heathlands
- Are planted on deep organic soils such as peat, due to a net loss of carbon to the atmosphere
- Are planted on open moorland or grazing marshes where ground nesting birds require large open habitats to nest
- Detract from important ancient field patterns or features
- Obstruct valued views or skylines

Tewkesbury Borough Council will work with farmers and landowners within the borough to plant new hedgerows, where appropriate. This initiative has funding available through the Government's ['Countryside Stewardship Grants Scheme'](#).

All newly planted hedgerows that the council has awareness of will be mapped on an internal system and those on council owned land will be managed accordingly in line with this policy.

### 3.3 Margins and banks

Margins are an important part to a healthy hedgerow. When planning a new hedgerow, it's important to allow space for a margin to develop underneath. This can often be a problem when the hedgerow is a field margin to a field used for grazing, as livestock will often graze on any herbaceous plants or an arable field which is treated with pesticides, but where possible this feature should be encouraged. Margins can either be specifically planted, or colonisation can be encouraged. Seeds will eventually arrive and germinate from animals, the wind or the seed bank. It can be beneficial to



plant margins which suffer from poor soil quality with herb plug plants, to help enrich the soil and develop a healthy seed bank.

Although banks are very beneficial to a hedgerow; they create extra habitat, aid in regulating water flow, absorb noise and help to conserve soil, they are not always practical to create. Banks can be costly to create, as they usually require a substantial amount of soil extraction to build, and this is now seen as environmentally unacceptable. Larger banks can also make watering in a time of drought more difficult, and with droughts becoming more frequent, this is an issue that would need to be considered on an individual basis. However, where budgets and circumstances allow, smaller banks should be encouraged and created.

Much of this best practice advice has been taken from [Hedgeline](#): an active partnership run by the Tree Council, and supported by numerous charities and government departments.

A single or double rowed hedge will usually suffice for most planting requirements. A single rowed hedge should be planted at 4 plants per metre, 25cm gap between individual plants. A double rowed hedge should be planted at 5 trees per metre, planted in zig-zag pattern, leaving 50cm between plants on the same row and 40-50cm gap between rows. Some funding agreements may have their own requirements for planting, and if so, these will be followed.

If planting a hedgerow on a bank, 2 rows will be planted along the edge (comb) of the bank, leaving the middle either free, or so there is space to plant any standard trees.

If a hedgerow is being planted as a boundary, it will be positioned around 75cm-1m from the boundary edge, to allow the hedgerow to fill out as it grows and matures.

If standard trees are being planted within a new hedgerow, then species must firstly be selected due to their suitability for the site; trees such as oak, beech or sycamore may grow too large when mature. Smaller trees such as crab apple, rowan, hawthorn or holly are equally suitable as hedgerow standards, and should be considered if space is at a premium. Larger standards should be planted approximately 20m apart, and smaller species 5m apart.

Hedgerows will be planted during the winter planting season, between November and March.

### 3.4 Aftercare and protection

Newly planted hedgerow trees will be mulched, to aid in water retention, weed suppression and soil condition. Newly planted plants should be well watered, and, if there is any period of a winter drought, should be watered up to 3 times a month.

Depending on the location of the new hedge, some protection may be required to aid with protection from grazing from rabbits, sheep, cattle and deer. There is no requirement for every plant to survive, and it can be cheaper to replace plants than to erect a fence or to plant each tree with guards. Both fencing and guards can make maintenance more time consuming and more difficult, and sometimes no protection can be the best option; this will be a situational decision. Work is still underway in the UK to develop and produce an effective plastic-free tree guard, and Tewkesbury Borough Council will commit to not using any plastic protection for any new trees planted on its land.

Some funding may require a fence or guards, and if so, this will be followed as directed.

## 4. Communication

As a policy that is in the public eye, Tewkesbury Borough Council will ensure that it publicises the positive work that it is doing to help combat climate change. Tewkesbury Borough Council will communicate both externally and internally details of any new hedgerow planting projects that it is involved in, whether this be through newsletters, internal bulletins, social media posts or updates on its website.

### 4.1 Internal communications

Tewkesbury Borough will work closely with internal departments (not limited to the below), to ensure that projects and partnership working are promoted across the organisation.

Planning – to ensure that planting projects and current management of hedgerows adhere to planning regulations, and do not impinge on and building safety. This will be particularly beneficial when considering new planting projects that could contribute towards carbon credits and/or biodiversity net gain (BNG).

Waste and Recycling Team – they oversee the current contract of UBICO, who are responsible for much of the street scene and maintenance provision throughout the borough, to ensure that the best practises are being followed for both new and existing hedgerows, as well as

guaranteeing that no pesticides, herbicides or peat-rich compost is used in any of the work contracted out.

Property services – working towards the carbon neutral 2030 target, new and existing projects will help sequester and capture carbon to offset against the council's emissions.

## 4.2 External communications

Tewkesbury Borough Council will work closely with neighbouring districts, boroughs and the county council to deliver reasoned and successful hedgerow planting projects. The council will work closely with local environmental charities, to increase the scope of projects and to deliver where is best for both the borough, the county, and the wider environment. The council will communicate new projects with an emphasis on involving town and parish councils to be more involved in how projects are delivered and managed. The council will utilise the local tree warden groups, whose local knowledge will be key, in ascertaining areas where species flourish and falter, to further enhance the chances of project success.

## Actions

- 1) *Assess the health of our current stock – including potential risks from diseases and pests*
- 2) *Obtain a detailed picture of the council’s current hedgerow network and identify gaps that require replanting. Use software to accurately record and monitor new stretches of hedgerow (December 2024 onwards)*
- 3) *Continue to work with partners to identify new locations for hedgerow planting*
- 4) *Increase hedgerow network throughout the borough, particularly on council owned land*
- 5) *Plant and establish a diverse range of trees and hedgerow plants which will tolerate the changing climate and ensure that planted hedgerows and any trees have a 90% survival rate with a detailed and funded management plan*

## References

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<sup>i</sup> [Forest Carbon | Unlocking the power of hedgerows in the UK](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [The Management of Hedgerows \(England\) Regulations 2024 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6692597664055296>

<sup>vi</sup> [Hedgerow-Learning-Guide-3-Hedge-planting-and-growing.pdf \(hedgelink.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Hedgerow biodiversity | Hedgelink](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Hedgerow Carbon Code: “good news for UK agriculture, climate change and British wildlife” - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust \(gwct.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>ix</sup> [TWECOM ORC Best Practice Guide v 1.0.pdf \(organicresearchcentre.com\)](#)

<sup>x</sup> [Hedgerow-Learning-Guide-3-Hedge-planting-and-growing.pdf \(hedgelink.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>xi</sup> [The Benefits of Healthy Hedgerows \(ptes.org\)](#)

<sup>xii</sup> [Hedgerow-Learning-Guide-3-Hedge-planting-and-growing.pdf \(hedgelink.org.uk\)](#)