



Dorset County Council

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Natural Environment Team guidance sheet



Hedges

February 2014

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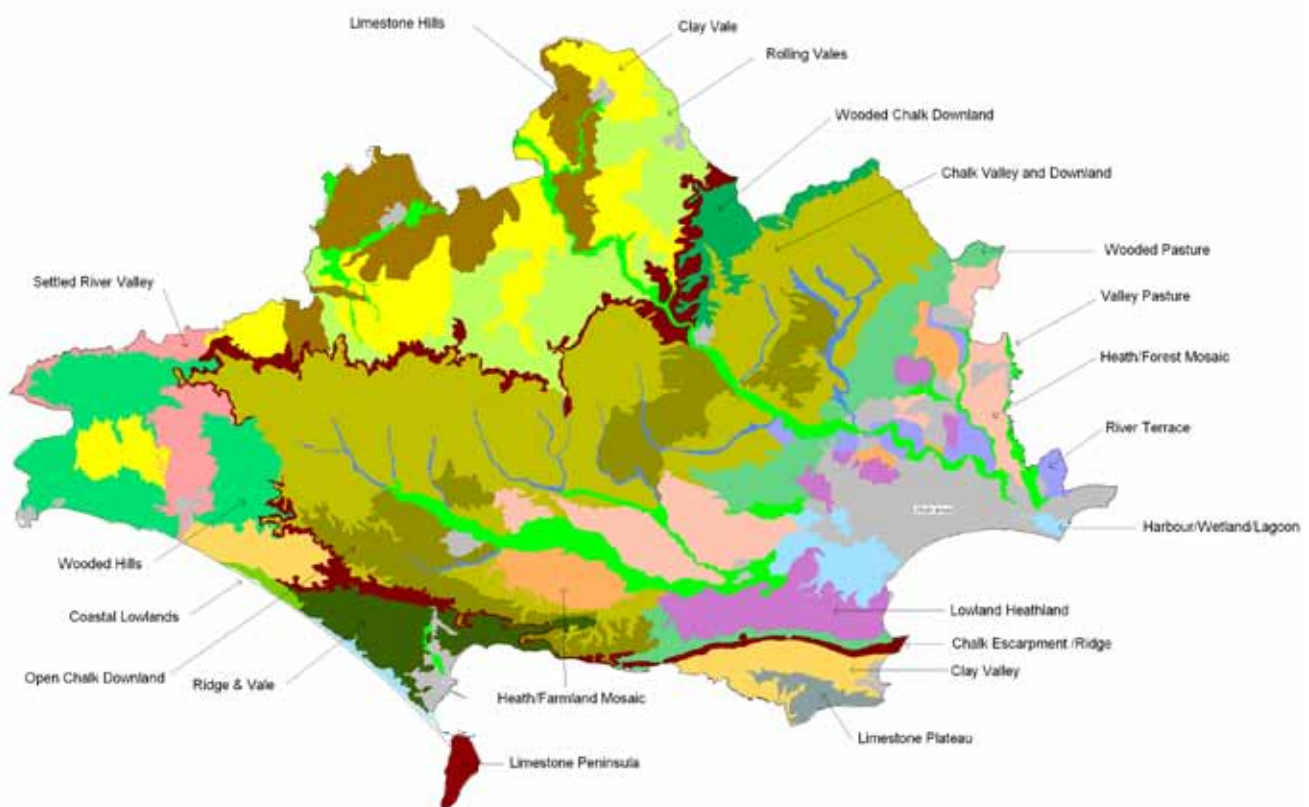
Introduction

The overall aim for hedgerow conservation and management in Dorset is to reduce fragmentation of the habitat; increase its robustness and intactness; promote good management practice and ensure hedges are properly considered in planning processes

The purpose of this guidance is to highlight the environmental, social and economic value of hedges and to promote best practice. It is aimed at a wide range of interest groups and individuals and in particular hopes to promote best practice in how the County Council manages its hedgerows. The key message is that hedges must be seen as valuable assets in Dorset.

The definition of a hedge provided in the Natural England Environmental Stewardship Farm Environment Plan guidance is:

'Any boundary line of shrubs over 20m long and less than 5m wide, provided that at one time the trees and shrubs were more or less continuous. This includes newly planted hedges'



Key Facts

The Countryside Survey 2000 indicated that just under 350,000 miles of hedgerows existed in England. In 2006 only 22% of the UK's hedgerows were in a favourable state and only 48% of 'managed' hedges in the UK were classified as being in good structural condition. We have no reliable data on the condition of Dorset's hedgerows. Dorset Environmental Records Centre has carried out several surveys with Nick Button's work in 2002/03 being valuable. This revisited some of Professor Good's 1930s sites and found that overall Dorset's hedgerows have deteriorated floristically and structurally. Management recommendations formed part of this survey work.

The Value of Hedgerows

Landscape value

Hedgerows are one of the defining characteristics of the Dorset landscape. In combination with rural lanes, hedgerow trees and woodlands; the field patterns created by hedges, contribute significantly to landscape character. Roadside hedges are one of the most visible and iconic features of rural landscapes. For this reason alone all hedges are important to conserve and enhance. In places like the Blackmoor, Halstock and Marshwood Vales they form the key characteristic of the landscape giving these vales their unique sense of place.

Dorset AONB and Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB (links below). Both these partnership organisations recognise the value of hedges in their management plans and realise that lack of proper management is a key issue. They have aims and objectives to undertake survey and mapping of key hedges with the overall aim of conserving and enhancing them.

www.dorsetaonb.org.uk

www.cwwdaonb.org.uk

Ecological Value

Hedgerows are important interconnected conservation corridors for wildlife, with many plants and animals relying on this habitat. They are recognised as a priority habitat for conservation within the Dorset and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). As they form a unique 'edge' habitat of woodland, scrub and grassland, hedgerows contain a wide range of species and are essential habitat and refuge for the majority of Dorset's farmland wildlife.



Yellowhammer: © Peter Moore Photography

Over 125 priority BAP species are closely associated with hedgerows, 11% of all such species. Although very few are wholly dependent on hedgerows, the loss of hedgerows or a decline in their quality will have a significant adverse impact on their populations.

Hedgerows are also important for a large number of threatened or rare species. Key species for Dorset's hedges include Yellowhammer, Dormouse, Brown Hairstreak butterfly and Copse Bindweed and characteristic species include Hedge brown butterfly, Whitethroat, Red Campion and Bank Vole.

UK wide, 21 priority BAP bird species are associated with hedgerows, and for 13 of these, hedgerows are a primary habitat. Similarly, 16 out of the 19 birds used by Government to assess the state of farmland wildlife are associated with hedgerows, with 10 using them as a primary habitat. The linear nature of hedges means they can be important for bats moving between roosting sites and feeding areas.

Ancient and or species rich hedgerows are key habitats and are those that support the greatest diversity of plants and animals. As a region, the south-west probably has a greater number of hedges remaining than any other region in the UK. In Dorset, the west of the county in particular holds the highest concentration of this habitat.



Blackmoor Vale aerial photo showing interconnecting function of hedges

Green Infrastructure value

Hedges, along with parks, private gardens, agricultural fields, trees, woodland, green roofs, green walls, rivers and ponds contribute to the economic, social and environmental value of interconnected green components of the environment. This value is now well understood and Dorset's hedgerows contribute to this Green Infrastructure network.

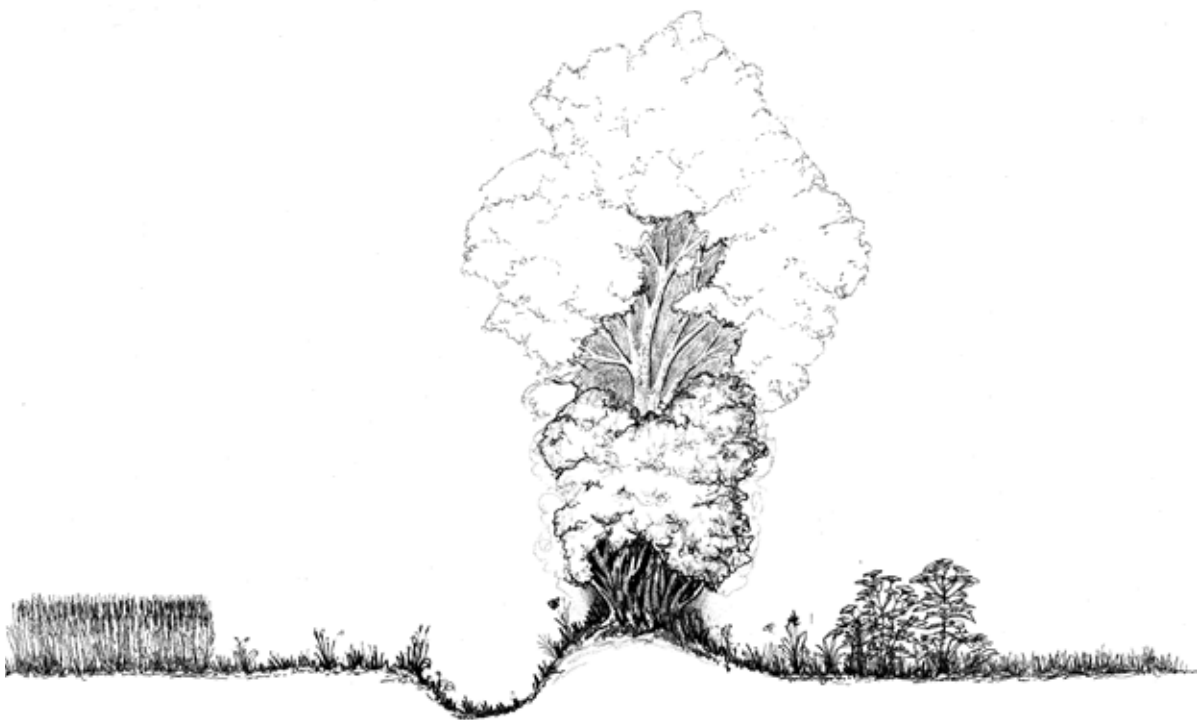
Climate change presents one of the biggest challenges that humankind will face over the next century and substantial changes to our climate are now unavoidable. There are two approaches to tackling the threat of climate change;

- * Mitigating (or cutting) our greenhouse gas emissions
- * Adapting to the expected consequences or impacts of these future changes.

Landscapes will need to respond to changing requirements and hedgerows, as key components of green infrastructure, can play an important role in delivering both of these approaches.

These are solutions which not only offset the impacts of climate change but enhance biodiversity, improve amenity as well as delivering economic and social benefits.

In terms of mitigating emissions, green infrastructure helps reduce the atmospheric concentration of carbon by locking it up in both soils and vegetation with hedges, woodlands and forested sites storing more carbon than other types of vegetation. The very same vegetation can filter out harmful airborne pollutants, reduce the rate of flow of water within catchments, so help to reduce flooding downstream and also cut emissions through the production of biomass which can be used as a substitute for fossil fuels to produce a zero carbon fuel for heating and energy production. This all has an economic value to farmers and landowners.



Historical and Cultural value

Along with features like rural villages, churches, railings and walls, hedgerows and their associated ditches and banks are all part of our cultural and landscape heritage. They tell the story of land use and the division of the land, often mark our ancient parish boundaries and still supply us with some of our iconic food and drinks such as jams and Sloe gin. The perception is that most hedgerows are relatively recent additions to the countryside, having been planted under the Enclosure Acts of the early 19th Century. In fact, at least half our hedges are older than this, and many are hundreds, some even thousands, of years old. Some are remnants of ancient woodlands, left as boundary markers when woodland was cleared for farmland.

Ancient hedges are those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts mainly between 1720 and 1840. A great many of Dorset's hedgerows are ancient and therefore of historical interest in their own right, particularly where they mark parish boundaries and ancient monuments. Often veteran trees, their lives prolonged by repeated pollarding or coppicing over the years, reveal the great age of old hedgerows.

A survey by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology revealed that between 1984 and 1990 hedgerow length in England declined by 20%. Changes in farming practices, the development of agricultural land, damage caused by straw and stubble burning, neglect and indiscriminate trimming all contributed to this decline. One response to this was the introduction of the Hedgerows Regulations in 1997, which imposed restrictions on the removal of older hedges and those with a diverse species mix.

One of the key factors governing the future survival species rich hedges is the application of appropriate management techniques such as hedge laying. These methods can be labour intensive and require specialist skills but Dorset has a long tradition of hedge laying, which contributes to our cultural heritage.



Traditionally laid hedgerow:
© Dorset AONB

Law and Legislation

A brief summary of the law, rules and regulations are provided on Natural England's document found on their website.

Hedge Regulations

Under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 it is against the law to remove or destroy certain hedgerows without permission from the local planning authority. The local planning authority is also the enforcement body for offences created by the Regulations.

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Planning and Tree Preservation Orders

All trees, regardless of their protected status, are a material consideration in a planning application, and consequently the Local Planning Authority will need to consider them.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) when considering planning applications. TPOs may be made either to prevent the removal of significant trees, or to protect significant trees from damage. Trees with TPOs require consent from the Local Authority before they can be pruned or removed. All trees within Conservation Areas which have a stem diameter of at least 7.5 cm are automatically protected, and pruning or removal requires the consent of the Council. TPOs can be placed on any trees including woodland and hedgerow trees, but not hedgerows themselves.

Wildlife legislation

The presence of protected wildlife must be considered prior to any work affecting a hedge. The main laws being the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and also the Species and Habitats Regulations 2010. Wild birds are all protected including during the nesting period from damage and destruction of their nests. Some species such as barn owls which often use hedgerow trees as nest sites are given additional protection from disturbance. Similarly bats may be roosting in hedgerow trees, and are afforded protection from killing, injury, and from disturbance, damage and obstruction of their roosts. Most routine hedgerow maintenance such as trimming or laying are timed to avoid sensitive periods. However, specific ecological surveys will be required where the proposed work is more detrimental to the hedge; i.e. removal and therefore likely to cause harm to any protected species e.g. Dormice, which may be present. Section 40 of Natural Environment and Rural Communities 2006 places an obligation on public bodies to consider priority habitats in their decision making.

Guidance on protected wildlife can be found on the Dorset For You website.

Felling licence

When felling more than 5 cubic metres of timber in a calendar quarter, you may need a Forestry Commission (FC) Felling Licence. For further information, the FC has produced the guidance 'Tree Felling – getting permission'.

www.forestry.gov.uk

You may also need permission for work on trees that are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Contact your local authority Tree Officer for advice.

High hedges

New powers which came into operation in England on 1 June 2005 were created for local authorities under part eight of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 to tackle problems associated with high hedges.

People are able to take complaints to their district/ borough council about high hedges, provided they have tried and exhausted all other means for resolving their hedge dispute. The council will expect you to provide documentary evidence to demonstrate that you have tried to amicably address the problem within the last six months and that you have kept records of letters, conversations and mediation.

If you can demonstrate the above, the council can look at your complaint if the hedge is made up of a line of two or more evergreen or semi evergreen trees or shrubs, it is over a height of two metres (measured from natural ground level), and is capable of obstructing light or views and can detract from the reasonable enjoyment of your home or garden due to its height. A fee is charged for the complaint procedure. For more information please contact:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9413/overgardenhedge.pdf

Current management & best practise

Current management

Hedgerows and boundary features, incl. mature trees, are a Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat . Landowners are responsible for maintaining and cutting their own hedges to ensure they do not overhang or obstruct the public highway. If, following an inspection, it is found that certain hedges are overhanging and/or causing an obstruction; the County Council will inform the landowner and request they be cut back. If the landowner fails to carry out the work, then DCC will proceed with formal enforcement action. Hedge cutting should be avoided during bird nesting season; 1st March to 31st July.

There is an established protocol with County Council Highways teams to consult NET on all schemes where hedgerows may be affected (e.g. removal required). Hedge Translocation guidance has also been produced by NET.



Traditionally laid beech hedgerow: © Dorset AONB

Hedge management - best practice

Trimming and laying

When skilfully carried out this can be very beneficial to conserving these important landscape features. It is best to leave trimming until the end of winter, but where it is impossible to get onto land at this time, trimming can be brought forward to early winter. Avoiding the bird nesting season; 1 March and 31 July. A proportion of ground cover vegetation at the hedge base should be retained over winter for ground-nesting birds. It should also be noted that over-management such as trimming a hedge too severely, can have a detrimental effect where this leads to poor regeneration of the woody plants with subsequent gaps appearing. In general, taller, bushier hedgerows provide more wildlife potential than smaller, thinner hedges and are better in providing shelter as wind breaks. If hedges really need to be cut when berries are still present, only the hedge sides should be trimmed, as this will leave some fruit along the tops.

Herbicide and fertilizers

Try to avoid herbicide spray and fertiliser drift into hedges, hedge verges and hedge bottoms. Livestock should be fenced away from hedgerows, and a strip of uncultivated or ungrazed land maintained between the hedge and the adjacent crop. Hedge planting is best done in the winter months using native British plants from local nurseries planted into well prepared and weed free ground.



Hedgerow planting: © Natural England

Access and rights of way

Where hedgerows are close to newly proposed paths and roads it is important to consider the impacts in the early design stages. Wherever possible hedgerows should be retained and become an important and integral part of the project. A good example is found at Thornford Village in West Dorset where the new access route between the village and the train station was placed on the field side of the hedge. This avoided the need to remove the hedge increasing safety for walkers and cyclist's and created a buffer between the intensively managed field and the hedge.



A Marshwood Vale verge and hedgerow

Conservation & enhancement opportunities

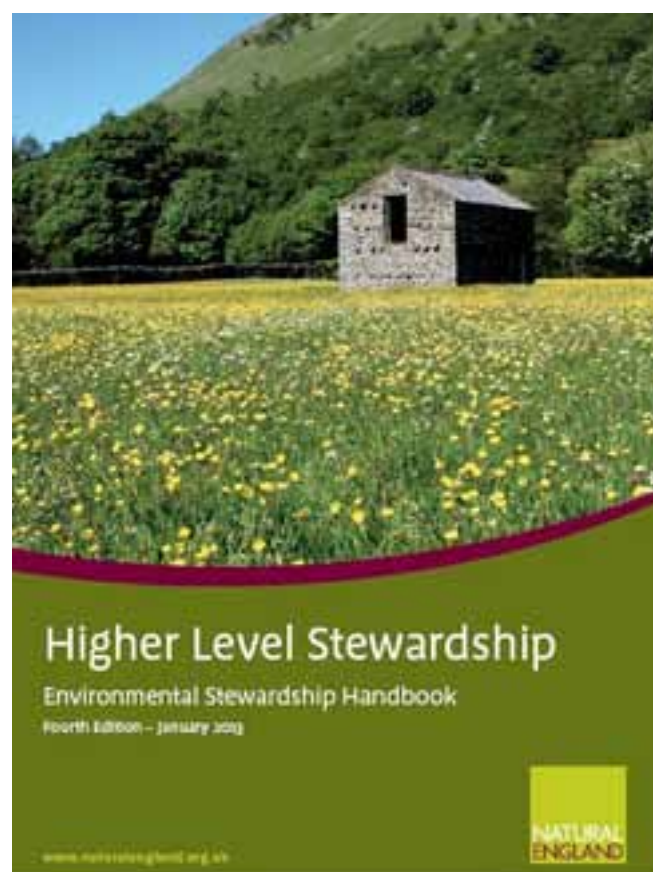
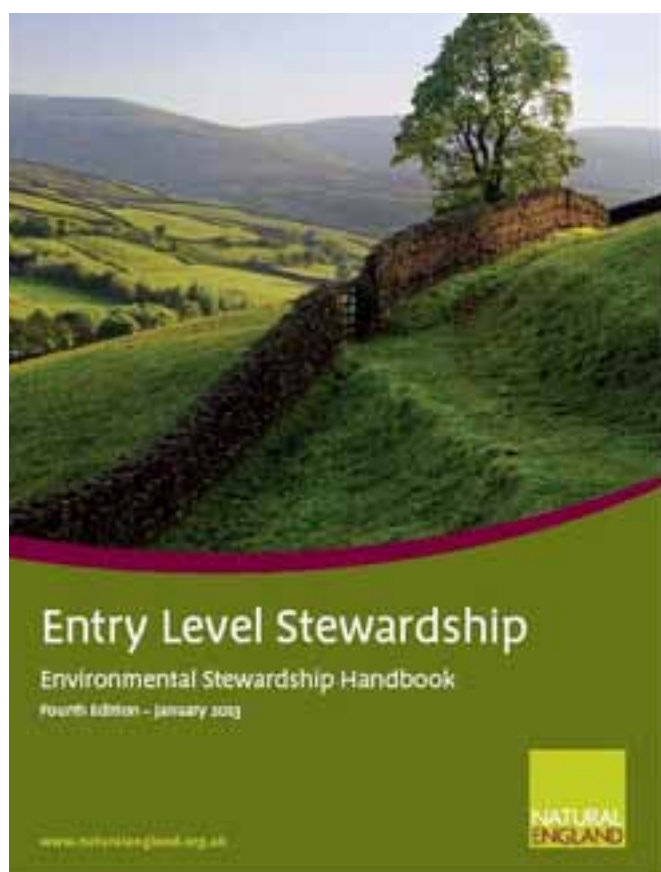
Agri-Environment Schemes

Environmental Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England to deliver effective environmental management. Environmental Stewardship is administered by Natural England.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) involves more complex types of management than the basic Entry Level. Agreements aim to deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority situations and areas.

Entry Level Stewardship (ELS): Payments are available for a range of hedgerow management options for any hedges composed of mainly (80% or more) native shrubs, more than 20 metres in length, and less than 5 metres wide at their base. Management involves regular trimming (on a two or three year cycle) or a traditional hedge-laying or coppicing cycle. A new option for hedgerow restoration has also been introduced from 1 January 2013.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS): Options include payments for maintenance of hedgerows of very high environmental value. These options manage hedgerows that support target/key species of farmland birds, insects or mammals, or which are of local or historic value. Capital works for e.g. laying, coppicing, planting up gaps or planting new hedgerow trees can be funded through a Capital Works Plan.



Hedgerow Survey Handbook

This Handbook sets out a standard way of recording hedgerows with a focus on hedgerow biodiversity. Surveying hedges is the first step in promoting and carrying out conservation and enhancement work. This Handbook is therefore recommended for all those interested in appropriate hedgerow management.

Hedgerow survey handbook



A well maintained hedgerow: © Natural England

Renewable energy opportunities

Not long ago hedges were essential sources of wood for cooking and heating, and were managed accordingly. Traditionally when a hedge was laid or coppiced, little was wasted. With concerns over climate change resulting from global warming, and driven by increasing energy prices, more interest has been shown recently in harvesting the material taken from hedgerows when they are cut, laid or coppiced, for use in heating. The wood can either be used directly in log-burning stoves, or chipped for use in biomass burners and boilers.

With the range of sites managed by the County Council this represents a considerable tonnage of biomass which could be used as an income generating resource and opportunities to exploit this need to be assessed. Renewable energy considerations provide further opportunities to manage hedges in innovative ways. A number of local authorities are already using arboricultural arisings from roadside tree management as wood chip fuel for biomass boilers in schools and other local authority buildings.



Chipping coppiced hedgerows: © Natural England

Contact details & further information

There are a lot of organisations interested and involved in hedgerow conservation and management. Some are listed below but we are happy to provide a first point of reference as required.

Dorset County Council - Natural Environment Team

T: 01305 221699

E: net@dorsetcc.gov.uk

www.dorsetforyou.com/landscapeandecology

Natural England

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/englands/habitatofthemoth/hedgerows.aspx

Hedgelink

www.hedgelink.org.uk/

Dorset Wildlife Trust

www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/index.html

National Hedge laying Society

www.hedgelaying.org.uk

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Service

www.fwagsw.org.uk/

DEFRA

www.gov.uk/protecting-rural-landscapes-and-features/hedgerows-and-watercourses