

Phosphorus Reduction Scheme

Cross-slope hedgerow creation

Funding is offered for creating hedgerows planted across the slope to prevent soil erosion and field run-off, with the aim of improving downstream water quality. Hedgerows help stabilise field edges and banks, preventing the direct deposition of sediment and leaching of nutrients from land management, as well as improving infiltration and uptake of water helping to reduce flood risk. Hedgerows also deliver biodiversity benefits through creating a habitat for nature.

Length of agreement available

10 years from planting. This is the minimum period of time that the hedge should be kept and maintained but please note that the hedgerow will be provided with ongoing and permanent protection under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

Where to use this measure

- Across slopes, or contour planting, where the creation of a new hedgerow would intercept surface runoff and nutrients.
- Where grass buffers alone are not likely to intercept surface runoff
- Where the creation of a new hedgerow would extend or link to existing hedgerows
- In fields that are farmed intensively or semi-intensively i.e. only fields that receive manure/fertiliser and/or are grazed intensively or semi-intensively. Rough grazing and conservation grazing is ineligible.

Where this measure cannot be used

- Hedgerows that have been/will be funded by any other funding scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship, Sustainable Farming Incentive, Biodiversity Net Gain or nutrient neutrality) are **not** eligible.
- To replace an existing hedgerow
- On historic or archaeological features
- On a site where a hedge has previously received a grant in the past 10 years
- On fields which are considered as low input or used for rough grazing or conservation grazing
- In situations where the management of the field is in breach of the Farming Rules for Water or Nitrate Vulnerable Zone rules (if applicable). Successful applicants are required to sign the declaration described in the record keeping section below.

Requirements

- Retain the hedge in its original location for at least 10 years from the agreement start date. This is the minimum period of time that the hedge should be kept and maintained but please note that the hedgerow will be provided with ongoing protection under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
- Planting:

- Plant according to bespoke planting plan created by FWAG SW as agreed by a Wessex Water catchment advisor
 - Plant hedge between 1st November and 31st March
 - Prepare a 1.5m wide strip to provide good soil conditions and to help reduce competition from other vegetation
 - Apply any herbicide to the 1.5m strip in the August or September prior to planting only, following product guidance and taking appropriate precautions not to pollute any adjacent watercourse
 - If planting on a bank, place plants just off the crest of the bank to avoid drying out
 - Plants must be kept clear of weeds for a minimum of three years after planting
 - Prevent livestock and grazing animals from damaging the woodland by setting fencing at least 1.2m from the outermost trees (full or part-funding for fencing maybe be available as part of the Wessex Water Phosphorus Reduction Scheme)
 - Protect with (preferably biodegradable) tree guards to protect the plants for the first two to three years of establishment
- Maintenance:
 - Keep planting strip clear of weeds until hedges have established, by cutting vegetation not spraying
 - Remove guards when plants have established
 - Replace any dead plants the following planting season
 - Light, regular trimming of the hedgerow in its early years will encourage dense, bushy growth. Ideally cut 50% of the whips to 15 – 20cm within the first 2 years after planting throughout the length of the new hedge i.e. 2 – 3 whips per metre, then cut the uncut ones the following winter unless stated otherwise on bespoke planting plan produced by FWAG SW.
 - Where fields are grazed, fence off new hedge to prevent grazing animals from damaging the hedge
 - If possible, water hedge plants during dry summers

Restrictions

Do not:

- Block or restrict access to open access land or obstruct public rights of way.
 - Carry out any work, including hedge trimming or laying, which might harm nesting birds or destroy their nests. The main nesting and breeding season is from 1st March to 31st August.
 - Once the decision has been made to establish a hedge, there is no minimum or maximum distance that the hedge needs to be positioned from the watercourse, however aesthetics and accessibility should be considered, as well as soil conditions for successful establishment.
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Consents and permits

- The Environment Agency should be consulted on all hedgerow creation along designated 'main river' locations as consent may be needed in these circumstances. If your land lies on the floodplain you will also need to talk to the local Internal Drainage Board before creating hedgerows.

- Hedgerow creation should be avoided on sites of archaeological or historic importance. You should ensure you have any relevant consents before carrying out the work in such circumstances. Visual intrusion and impacts on landscape character should also be considered in the construction and alignment of a new hedge line, particularly in designated landscapes or historic parkland.
- In wetland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and other priority habitat areas such as county wildlife sites, the grazing of ditch banks and riparian grazing marsh is often essential to maintain the ecological interest of the site. Natural England will not issue a consent for hedging on a designated site (SSSI etc) where this is considered detrimental to the conservation objectives.
- Inform the Rural Payments Agency if planting new hedges splits one existing field parcel into separate fields.

Record keeping and payment terms

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them with *the payment claim*. Payment will only be made upon satisfactory receipt of all of the following records:

- Photographs of the site before the new hedge is planted
- Photographs of each newly planted hedge line
- Soil analysis results (pH, P and K as a minimum) for the relevant fields dated within the past 3 years.
- Farm and field information needed to run a phosphorus loss tool for the farm and calculate the reduction in phosphorus loss to water arising from this work. This will include farm data relating to livestock numbers, cropping areas and fertiliser / manure inputs.
- Self-declaration that the terms of the project agreement have been adhered to (*key terms are listed above*).
- Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration confirming that:
 - reasonable precautions are taken to prevent nutrients and soil from the relevant field entering watercourses or from being leached to groundwater - to an extent that could cause pollution.
 - the relevant fields have not been (i) the source of a recorded pollution incident which could have been prevented by the farmer taking reasonable precautions to prevent that pollution and/or (ii) the subject of a warning, fine, prosecution or BPS deduction issued to the farmer by the Environment Agency or RPA for a breach of NVZ rules or Farming Rules for Water in the past 5 years.
- It is expected that to support and inform the above declaration, successful applicants will complete the Environment Agency's Agricultural Compliance Tool annually and submit it when completed to Wessex Water (who will hold it in confidence) and address any actions identified by the ACT. For agreements involving annual payments of more than 5 years duration and/or with a value in excess of £5,000 of annual payments, successful applicants are required to complete the ACT annually (when publicly available), submit it to Wessex Water and address any actions identified by the ACT.



Cross-slope hedgerow planted on a raised bank to intercept field runoff from the field above

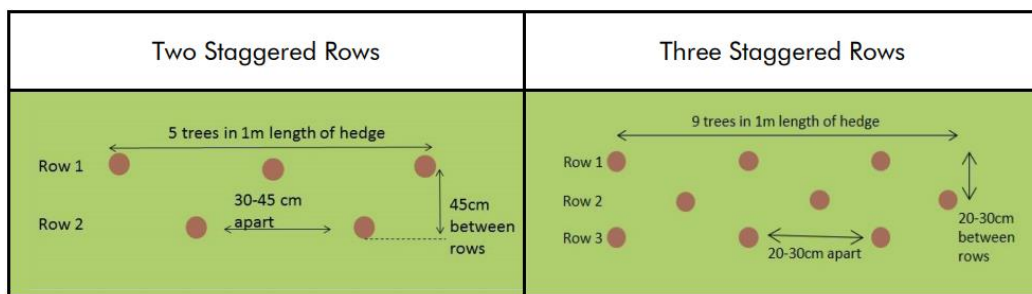


Photo Credits: FWAG SW Hills to Levels Project

Additional Information

Background to hedgerows

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/hedgerows/>

FWAG SW Cross-Slope Hedges

<https://www.fwagsw.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3a6b9e7a-7fb5-41dc-b1d3-0c3d600828a9>

Cross compliance for hedge trimming

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guide-to-cross-compliance-in-england-2020/gaec-7a-boundaries>

Hedgerow regulations 1997

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438652/hedgerow_guide_part_1.pdf

Hedgelink: The hedgerow management cycle

https://www.hedgelink.org.uk/cms/cms_content/files/78_hedgelink_a5_12pp_leaflet_7.pdf