

The Town and Country Planning Acts 1934 – 1981

The Isle of Man Planning Scheme (Development Plan) Order 1982

Manx Hedges

Introduction

1. This Planning Circular addresses the subject of the retention and construction of Manx hedges.
2. Agricultural land has been enclosed using Manx hedges, or sod banks, for over 300 years. These hedges not only contribute to the distinctive character of the rural landscape, but also constitute features which are in themselves of interest and attraction.

Policy

3. Any Manx hedge which makes a positive contribution to public amenity should be retained. This policy will apply in particular to those hedges which bound a public highway (including public footpaths), and those which divide agricultural land from developed land.
4. Sometimes, road-widening or access improvement will necessitate the removal of a Manx hedge. In other instances, there may be proposed a new, undefined boundary between agricultural and residential or industrial land. In these, and perhaps other appropriate circumstances, there will usually be a requirement by the Planning Committee to construct a new hedge. Developers may, of course, elect to use this traditional form of boundary without there being any requirement so to do.

Dimensions

5. The statutory dimensions of a Manx hedge have altered with time. In 1577, the required height was 4ft. 6in., although mountain hedges (between arable and rough grazing land) were usually more substantial. By 1667, as more, and possibly larger animals were kept on lowlands, better hedges were required, and the minimum height was increased to 5ft. And by 1691, this was again increased to 6ft., or 5ft. 6in., with a ditch 3ft. wide and 1ft. 9in. deep.
6. When construction of a new hedge is required as part of a scheme of development, the dimensions should normally be:-

Width: 6ft. at the base
 3ft. at the top

Height: 6ft.

Making a Manx hedge

7. First, along the site of the proposed hedge, the surface sods are stripped and set aside for use in building the faces of the hedge. The sods should be cut in courses parallel to the hedge, and such as to produce a bevelled edge on one side. An area 3 or 4 yards wide wither side of the hedge may have to be stripped in this way.
8. These sods are laid in horizontal courses, with the vertical joints avoiding those above and below, like bricks in a wall, except that the sod facings slope inwards towards the summit. Each sod is turned over so that the grassy part lies below, and the bevelled edge is exposed on the outside of the hedge. The sods should be beaten into position with the side, rather than the "flat" of a spade, such as not to "put a polish on" the face and prevent the grass from growing.
9. The core of the hedge is made of broken soil and stones, raised from the sides once the surface has been stripped, leaving a trench on either side. This core is trodden down between the outer facings.
10. The top may be sown with gorse or hawthorn. This was done traditionally by inserting seeds into the twists of the straw rope (suggane), and pegging the rope into a shallow trench opened along the top of the hedge. More recently, daffodils have been planted in roadside hedges with good effect.

Conclusion

11. The Department hopes to encourage the retention and construction of Manx hedges as an integral part of the landscaping of new developments. The references in paragraph 12 may provide more background information.

References

12. a) The Naturalist in the Isle of Man:-
Dr. Larch Garrad, 1972;
- b) The "Manks Spade" and the Making of Sod Hedges:-
The Journal of the Manx Museum Volume IV, Pages 165-167 (Dec. 1939)
- c) General View of the Agriculture of the Isle of Man:-
Thomas Quayle, 1812, Chapter VI, Section II

Status

13. This Circular is issued in pursuance of the powers vested in the Department of Local Government and the Environment by Section 5 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1934, and article 11 (2)(a)(vi) of the Isle of Man Planning Scheme (Development Plan) Order 1982. Any enquiries in respect of the contents of this Circular should be directed to the Director of Planning.