



**Isle of Man
Government**

Reiltys Ellan Vannin

Manx Hedgerow Management

Code of best practice

Glen Roy and Snaefell summit from Creg ny Baa back road. P McEvoy 2009



Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture

Rheynn Chymmltaght, Bee as Eirinys

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Introduction

In light of the implementation of the Countryside Care Scheme (now Agricultural Development Scheme and its implications for management of the farmed countryside, a review of the Manx Hedgerow Management 'Code of Best Practice' was undertaken following extensive consultation in September 2009.

This revised version of the Code has a new name to reflect the fact that there are a variety of hedge types in the Isle of Man – and guidance is provided on the management of each of them. There is a chart which clearly explains what applicants to the Agricultural Development Scheme **must** do in order to avoid Cross Compliance penalties and what land managers can **choose** to do, to maximise the benefits of their hedges.

Although the restricted hedge cutting dates have been retained, farmers can apply to DEFA to cut outside these dates in certain situations. This is explained most easily in the following examples in the FAQ sections.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are hedges important?

Hedges provide multiple benefits in the countryside. Hedges provide *shelter* and an effective *stockproof barrier* and are particularly useful at *preventing the spread of disease* between neighbouring farms as a thick stockproof hedge will prevent 'nose-to-nose' contact between stock.

Hedges also help wildlife by providing *food, shelter* and *breeding* sites for *birds, butterflies, lizards and small mammals*. As well as being an important *habitat* in their own right, hedges act as *wildlife corridors* allowing the dispersal of species between isolated habitats.

They are an integral part of the *beauty* of the Manx countryside. The vernacular 'Manx sod-hedge' also constitutes as important part of our unique island heritage. Well managed hedges play a vital role in maintaining the health of the natural environment.



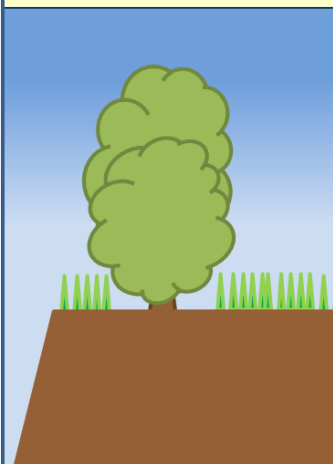
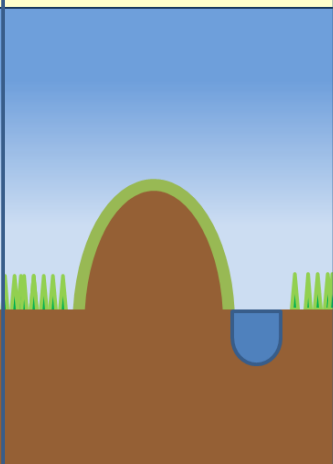
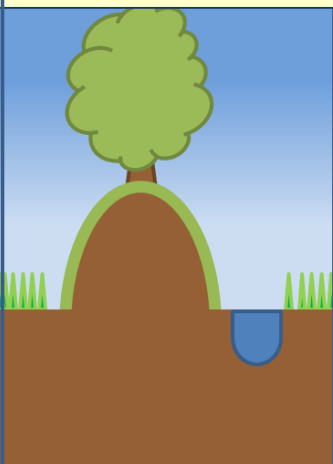
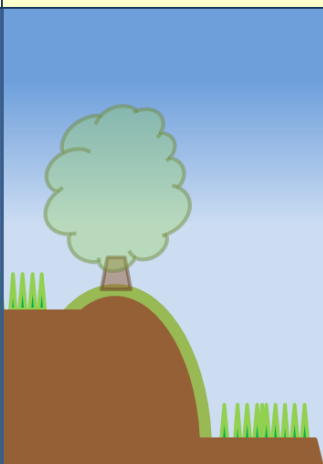
How can wildlife in hedges be encouraged?

The stock-proofing, shelter, landscape effect and wildlife value of hedges all benefit from regular hedgerow management on a simple rotational basis. To ensure that hedges continue to provide valuable habitat, it is vital that they are retained in good condition and managed so as to give wildlife a chance to thrive. The main emphasis in this Code is therefore on the need to avoid hedge cutting operations during spring and summer when birds are nesting and plants are in flower.

What is the difference between a hedgerow and a sod hedge? Should I manage them differently?

A hedgerow is defined as a linear row of woody vegetation. A hedgebank is a linear row of woody vegetation on a raised grassy bank, whilst a Manx sod hedge is usually defined as a tall grassy bank, which may, or may not have associated woody vegetation e.g. hawthorn, gorse or fuchsia. Despite these differences, all hedges with a woody/shrubby component (where nesting birds may occur) are included in the term "hedge" for the purposes of the Agricultural Development Scheme. All of the above hedge types may have an associated ditch or watercourse and may have a few, or many mature trees.

NB: The 'bank part' of a hedgebank and Manx sod hedge require different treatment to the woody component.

Hedgerow More typical of the English countryside, but does occur frequently on the Island. Usually consist of a line of shrubs (+/- trees). Species vary, but hawthorn is most frequent. Trees spp. depend on soil type but typically include ash and elm.	Manx Sod Hedge Typical Manx field boundary +/- ditch on one side. Typical construction of field rubble and faced with turf. Steep banks can be species-rich with primroses in Spring and ferns later in season. Height can vary considerably.	Hedge bank Similar to Manx sod hedge, but with a well-defined line of shrubs planted on top. Typical dominant species include European gorse, fuchsia and hawthorn. Shrub layer and turf bank require different management.	Sod bank Similar to a single-faced sod hedge, usually occurs on sloping ground +/- shrub layer. Ideal trimming height should be assessed as 1.5-2m above top of bank.
			

Hedge types in the Isle of Man

I am in the Agricultural Development Scheme, when am I permitted to cut my hedges?

Hedge cutting can take place between the 1st of September and the end of February. It is recommended that hedges are cut in January/February to ensure that berries etc can be used by wild birds. Note: even if cutting in the permitted period, there may be nesting birds still present. It is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1990 to damage or disturb the nest of any nesting bird.

The restricted dates interfere with my farming operations, can the rules be relaxed?

If there is a narrow window after harvest for resowing a sward or crops, hedges in the relevant fields may be cut outside of the permitted cutting period after consultation with DEFA. The Department will also consider extending the cutting period for other operational problems, such as wet ground or horticultural rotations. If you wish to cut hedges outside of the permitted cutting period, please complete a Hedge Cutting form, obtainable from DEFA or download one from <https://www.gov.im/media/395550/ads-works-approval-and-hedge-cutting-form-cf.pdf>. To avoid a Cross Compliance penalty, farmers need to be able to produce a signed approval form from DEFA at the time of inspection, if hedge cutting is underway outside of the permitted period.

Livestock have broken through a hedge and have access to arable crops/neighbouring farm/the road. What should I do?

As all of the above scenarios involve threats to public safety, animal health or damage to foodstuffs and are exempt under Part I (4) of the Wildlife Act 1990. You are therefore permitted to trim back the hedge to erect a stockproof fence to secure the area where the breach occurred. The length of hedge trimming may exceed the breached section only as far as is required to secure the new fencing to suitable strainers.

Should I cut all of my hedges at the same time?

You can cut all of your hedges after the 31st August, however it is best practice to cut hedges every 2-3 years. This will ensure that there is always suitable habitat on your farm for the wildlife which relies on uncut hedges and provides more flowers and berries and increased habitat for nesting birds the following Spring. The best method is to cut hedges on a two- or three-year cycle. This usually saves on labour and machinery costs especially where hedges contain mainly slow-growing species such as hawthorn.

I am responsible for the management of roadside hedges and shared access lanes, when can I cut these?

Although roadside hedges are the owners' responsibility, the DoI may manage the cutting of certain areas in the interests of public safety. It is permitted to cut roadside hedges in the restricted period if there is reason to believe that the safety of the public is at risk e.g. reduced visibility or overgrown vegetation on footpaths. If in doubt, consult DEFA or DoI.

Who is responsible if a third party cuts or damages my hedges?

Provided that you have not given permission for the actions carried out by a third party, they will be held responsible for any breach of the Wildlife Act. You will not be penalised under the Agricultural Development Scheme if this happens, although the onus will be on you to prove a third party's involvement.

Summer hedge growth is causing problems in my farm lanes and gateways. What can I do?

Vigorous summer growth usually consists of arching bramble stems that protrude into lanes and fields. These can constitute a health risk to people and livestock, as well as being unsympathetic to vehicle paintwork! In this instance, the protruding stems can be trimmed either by hand or chainsaw without the consent of DEFA. However, care must be taken not to cut the main body of the hedge until the end of the restricted period. If, on inspection, it is found that the main body of the hedge has been cut, this will constitute a breach of Cross Compliance and penalties will be applied.



Should I cut all of my hedgerows the same way?

Different plants and animals prefer different shapes and sizes of hedge, so try and create as much variety as possible. Overall, favour large, dense, infrequently cut hedgerows. As a general rule, the wider and taller a hedgerow is, the more wildlife it has, so try and manage most of your hedges so they become as big as possible. Keep some hedges short (less than 2 m high) for birds such as yellowhammers, linnets, whitethroats and partridges; and where surrounding land is used by breeding waders such as lapwing, snipe and redshank.

Is there anything I should be aware of when I am cutting my hedges?

Watch out for nesting birds in the hedge and lizards basking on the banks. Even if you are outside the restricted period there may be birds nesting (from as early as February and finishing as late as the end of September). It is an offence under the Wildlife Act to intentionally or recklessly disturb or damage the nest of any wild bird. Lizards are also protected under the Wildlife Act.

What if my hedges look untidy?

Modern farming is not just about food production, but also about producing environmental benefits, such as creating wildlife habitats and attractive landscapes. People will disagree over what constitutes a beautiful countryside, but there should be a middle-ground between neat, manicured hedges and overgrown monsters that are encroaching into field parcels. A rotational cut of 2-3 years would be a fair balance for wildlife and hedge maintenance. "Tidiness" does not always equal a well managed hedge for either farming or wildlife interests.



Sod hedges, hedge banks and field margins

Why are the restricted dates different for sod banks?

Sod banks should not be cut between 31st March and 31st August. Please note that this differs from the cutting period for hedges. The restricted dates for the cutting of sod-banks are to benefit flora and fauna other than nesting birds. Banks are important basking sites for lizards and the rich and varied flora can provide a valuable nectar source for insects.

How can I control injurious weeds by the 1st August without breaching Cross-Compliance?

In many cases, field margins and sodbanks do not hold more than a few scattered thistles or cushags (ragwort) and may not be considered as contravening the Weeds Act 1957. A detailed guide to the management of ragwort aka cushag was produced in 2013 that details a risk based approach to the management of this injurious weed https://www.gov.im/media/402197/cushag_code_july_2013.pdf

Light infestations can be managed by pulling individual plants, however if an infestation is more severe, topping, or weed-wiping are the recommended methods of control. If you are still concerned then contact DEFA for further advice.

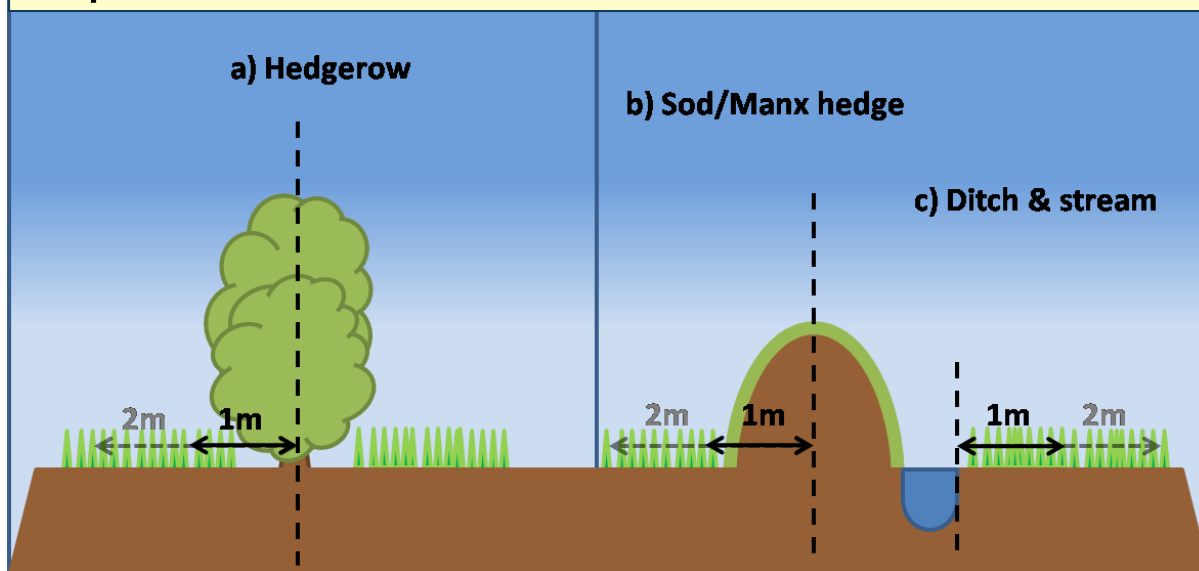
When I am strip grazing a field, or using electric boundary fencing can I cut back overhanging growth to prevent excessive earthing?

Yes, as this is a stock management issue, it is permitted to trim overhanging grass or bramble stems outside of the permitted hedge cutting period by hand or chainsaw without the consent of DEFA. However, care must be taken not to cut the main body of the hedge until the end of the restricted period. If, on inspection, it is found that the main body of the hedge has been cut, this will constitute a breach of Cross Compliance and penalties will be applied.

Do I have to leave an uncultivated strip in the field margins?

The Agricultural Development Scheme requires a 1m uncultivated strip to be maintained along the edges of fields sod hedges, ditches and streams. The application of fertilizer, pesticides, lime or slurry is not permitted in this area. For added wildlife benefits, it is recommended that at least a 2m strip is maintained.

The Countryside Care Scheme requires a minimum of 1m field margin from the hedge (a) or sod bank (b) centreline. However it is best practice to leave at least 2m from the centreline to create a diverse field margin. Where a ditch or stream (c) is present, the buffer zone should extend 1m (preferably 2m) from the top of the watercourse.



Why have a field margin?

Field margins act as a buffer zone between the field boundary and the crop or road, and form important wildlife corridors between species rich areas. Field margins are a key habitat for a number of rare and declining species, including many farmland birds, arable plants and insects. The structural condition of a field margin is extremely important for biodiversity along with the presence of associated features such as ditches, walls or watercourses.

Wide margins provide easy access for hedge trimming in late winter, after berries have been eaten, without damage to adjacent arable crops.

Having an additional 1m sterile strip i.e. bare, uncultivated ground can prevent crop invasions from weeds such as cleavers and barren brome.

Won't having a field margin significantly affect my cropping area?

Not as much as you think! If we assume a 2 acre (square) field is a typical small Manx field, which has a 1m wide hedgerow around it, a 1m margin will reduce cropping area by 2.3%, a 2m margin will reduce cropping area by just 4.5%. These figures will be vastly reduced for larger fields.

Key best practice points for shrub hedgerows:

- ✚ Retain all shrub hedgerows wherever possible;
- ✚ Nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife Act 1990, so always check prior to cutting to make sure no nests are in use, and avoid cutting altogether during the main bird nesting season from 1st March - 31st August. Seek DEFA approval if cutting is required outside of this period.
- ✚ Rather than cutting every year, cut hedges according to a pre-planned rotation every two or more years. This allows shrubs such as hawthorn to flower freely and produce berries;
- ✚ Cut in late winter, avoiding hard frosts. This leaves the berries and seeds for birds to feed on over the early winter months;
- ✚ Allow shrubby hedges to grow to at least 1.8-2m high (5-6ft) except where road safety requires them to be lower;
- ✚ Retain all hedgerow trees, allowing saplings to develop into trees where possible, especially at hedge intersections and corners;
- ✚ Where possible, leave very old, dying and dead trees wherever they are not a hazard, as the dead wood will provide a valuable habitat for bats and beneficial insects; *elm* is the exception:
- ✚ After hedge cutting, you must burn any cut elm branches on site to avoid leaving potential breeding grounds for Dutch Elm Disease beetles. Wherever elm is present, check regularly to see whether it is displaying any symptoms of Dutch Elm Disease. If in doubt contact the Forestry, Amenity and Lands Division. If on-site burning is not appropriate, diseased elm will be removed free of charge.
- ✚ Keep fertilisers, slurry, manure, lime and pesticides (including herbicides, insecticides and fungicides) away from the edge of hedgerows except for essential spot treatment of injurious weeds;
- ✚ Ensure flail operators are trained in cutter maintenance and use;
- ✚ Avoid using mechanical flails on thick wood or tree trunks/branches as this encourages tree diseases and poor re-growth; instead use hand saws or chainsaws for a clean cut on thicker trunks and branches;
- ✚ When ploughing, keep at least 2m (6ft) from the centre of the hedge:

Key best practice points for traditional sod hedges:

- ✚ Avoid cutting grass banks between 31st March and 31st August except where road safety requires it, otherwise protected species (e.g. orchids and breeding lizards) could be adversely affected;
- ✚ Remove cut material where practicable, to avoid encouraging weeds which thrive on grassland choked by layers of old cuttings;
- ✚ Keep fertilisers, slurry, manure, lime and pesticides (e.g. herbicides, fungicides and insecticides) away from sod banks;
- ✚ Laws relating to injurious weed control (e.g. cushags, thistles) apply to hedges as elsewhere; where injurious weeds occur, use topping and/or weed wipes rather than wholesale spraying;
- ✚ When ploughing, keep at least 2m (6ft) away from the centre line of the sod hedge bank (see diagram overleaf).

Other practical points to bear in mind:

- ✚ Prior to cutting, clearly mark any promising-looking saplings which you want to leave uncut in order to grow up into landmark "standard" trees;
- ✚ In a woody hedge, a gap of just a few yards is enough to discourage feeding bats and reduce the wildlife and landscape value of a hedge; it is therefore best to fill any gaps with native Manx tree and shrub species. This has the added advantage of improving the variety of age and structure of the hedgerow plants in the long term;
- ✚ Keep an eye out all year round for signs of diseased elms (a faded, wilting appearance in summer is one sign of potential infection);
- ✚ The Department of Infrastructure may trim verges for road safety purposes; often, however, this only extends to the base of most hedges and banks. The choice of whether to cut the top of hedges is up to the owner.

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Manx Hedge Management- Code of Best Practice

Farmers in the ADS **must** adhere to the Scheme rules below and **should** adhere to the additional Hedge Code guidelines for full benefit to wildlife and the countryside.

Manx Hedge Code- optional management that is best practice for Manx hedges.	Cross Compliance requirements which are compulsory for farmers applying to the Agricultural Development Scheme (refer to Scheme handbook)	Does the recommended management in the Hedge Code differ from Agricultural Development Scheme requirements?
Hedge removal		
Retain all shrub hedgerows wherever possible	GAEC Standard 16 Field boundaries must not be damaged or destroyed without written agreement of the Department	No difference
Cutting dates		
Restricted period 1 st March-31 st August (but cutting outside of this can be permitted by DEFA in some situations)	GAEC Standard 16 refers to the Hedge code (this document) BUT Minor trimming by hand is permitted if the work does not contravene the Wildlife Act 1990, particularly with reference to nesting birds	No difference (Note the possible alteration to cutting dates for arable cropped and wet fields)
Nesting birds protected under Wildlife Act 1990	SMR1- Conservation of Wild Birds refers to Wildlife Act 1990	No difference
Cut hedges on a 2+year rotation	Not required	Yes -rotational cut
Cut in late winter, leaving berries and seeds	Not required	Yes - later cut
Hedge height		
Allow shrubby hedges to grow 1.8-2m high	Not required	Yes -specified height
Hedgerow trees		
Retain all hedgerow trees, allowing saplings to develop into trees where possible	GAEC Standard 14 refers to Registered Trees and the Tree Preservation Act 1993	Yes - all trees protected not just Registered trees and those requiring a felling licence (dbh >8cm).
Where possible leave old, dying and dead trees where they are not a hazard (elm is an exception)	GAEC Standard 14 refers to Registered Trees under the Tree Preservation Act 1993	Yes - dead trees not protected as Registered Trees
After hedge cutting elm branches must be burnt on site	SMR2-Conservation of Flora and Fauna states that the farmer must take necessary steps to minimise spread of non-native species in the wild	No difference
Flail operations		
Ensure flail operations are trained in cutter maintenance and use	N/A	Yes - training
Avoid using mechanical flails on thick wood or tree trunks branches. Instead use hand saws or chainsaws.	N/A	Yes - equipment specification
Field margin buffer zone		
Keep fertilizer, slurry, manure, lime and pesticide away from edge of hedgerows (excluding spot treat of injurious weeds)	GAEC Standard 16 Must not apply slurry, pesticides etc closer than 1m to centre of hedgerow (excluding spot treat of injurious weeds <i>Weeds Act 1957</i>)	No difference
When ploughing, keep at least 2m from the centre of the hedge/sod bank	GAEC Standard 16 Must not cultivate within 1m of centre of hedgerow/sod bank	Yes -additional buffer
Sod bank management		
Avoid cutting grass banks between 31 st March and 31 st August (excepting road safety is an issue). Important for protected species (e.g. orchids, birds and lizards)	SMR2-Conservation of Flora and Fauna refers to the Wildlife Act 1990 and protected species	Yes -dates specified
Remove cut material where practicable to avoid encouraging weeds and to encourage herb diversity.	GAEC Standard 17- Encroachment of unwanted vegetation	No difference
Keep fertiliser, slurry, manure and pesticides away from sod banks	GAEC Standard 16 Must not apply slurry, pesticides etc closer than 1m to centre of bank (excluding spot treat of injurious weeds <i>Weeds Act 1957</i>)	No difference
Where injurious weeds occur, use topping and/or specific weed wipes rather than spraying	Spot treatment of injurious weeds required under the <i>Weeds Act 1957</i>	Yes -method of control
When ploughing, keep at least 2m from centre line of sod hedge bank.	GAEC Standard 16 Must not cultivate within 1m of centre of bank	Yes -additional buffer