



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Hedgerows

September 2008



Hedgerows

National lead organisation(s):
Defra

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire FWAG

A hedgerow is a more or less continuous line of woody vegetation that has been subject to a regime of cutting in order to maintain a regular shape. This includes both recently-managed and other hedges, including hedges with walls or fences.

Current status

National status

The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (ITE) Countryside Survey 1990 revealed that the total hedgerow length in England had fallen by over 20% during the period 1984-1990, a loss of 9,500 km per year. A further ITE survey for the period 1990-93 showed that the rate of loss had slowed to 3,500 km per year. During the same period new hedge planting increased from 1,900 km per year during 1984-1990 to 4,400 km per year during 1990-93 (Barr and Gillespie 1994).

Results from the 2000 Countryside Survey reveal that overall hedgerow and boundary feature loss in England has slowed to near zero (Defra 2001). The same trend was observed in Environmental Zone 1 (Easterly lowlands) in which Bedfordshire is located (Defra 2001).

Ninety percent of hedgerows nationally include hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, almost twice the frequency of the next most common species, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Twenty-eight percent of hedgerows in lowland England were found to be species-rich (Barr, Stuart, Smart and Firbank 2001).

While there was no significant loss of hedgerow trees in the UK between 1990 and 1998, in Environmental Zone 1, 66,000 hedgerow trees were lost, a statistically significant figure (Barr et al. 2001). Such losses can result from trees being removed, growing to become incorporated into a line of trees (i.e. canopies touching) or an area of trees (Barr et al. 2001). Oak *Quercus robur* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* are the most common hedgerow tree species, making up 65% of the total (Barr et al. 2001).

Local status

Two sample surveys of hedgerow cover were conducted in Bedfordshire using data from the last 50 years. The first examined hedgerow change over the period 1945-76; the second looked at the period 1976-91. The results revealed a rate of loss of 24% in the first survey,





which had dropped to just 2% during 1976-91. The total length of hedge in the county in 1991 was estimated to be 4,500 km.

Two recent surveys have been conducted, in Studham and Maulden Parishes. In Studham, 68% of hedgerows were found to be species-rich (Ward 2006). In Maulden this figure dropped to 34%. The Maulden survey revealed that 34% of hedgerows were less species-rich than in 1976. Fourteen percent were more species-rich. Results of the study also suggest that blackthorn and elder may be expanding their range in the parish, while some of the climber species may be disappearing (Webb 2007).

The oldest recorded hedges in the county date from 969 AD. A survey of hedgerows in Colmworth Parish, shows 45.5 km of hedgerow pre-enclosure rising to 110 km in 1838, but falling to 31.3 km in 1976 and 25 km in 1992. A recent survey has shown that 80 km of pre-1901 hedge survives within the urban area of Luton.

Current factors affecting hedgerows

- Lack of targeted grant aid for planting and hedgerow restoration (e.g., coppicing, laying)
- Fertiliser and/or pesticide drift
- Loss of hedgerow trees through senescence or removal, without replacement
- Low uptake of appropriate environmental stewardship options and difficulty in acquiring money for hedgerow planting
- Introduction of foreign cultivars of native species, leading to hybridisation and possible genetic erosion.

Current action

Site protection

The 1995 Environment Act made provision for regulations to be drawn up to allow local authorities to prevent the destruction of 'important' hedgerows. The Hedgerow Regulations came into force in 1997.

Management

The Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) replaced the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 2005. ELS will pay participating farmers for managing, restoring and improving existing hedgerows, while HLS will pay for creating new ones. Through its Entry Level, Higher Level and Organic Entry Level Schemes, ELS stands to deliver much of the national target for hedgerows and other farmland habitats.

Advisory services

Advice on hedgerow management and potential sources of funding is available from the following organisations:





- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- Natural England
- The Wildlife Trust
- Countryside management projects: The Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Forest of Marston Vale (for farmers within the Marston Vale area)
- Chilterns Conservation Board
- Country Landowners Association (CLA)
- RSPB
- Local authorities

Action plan objectives and targets

Objectives

Maintain and where possible expand the network of hedgerows in Bedfordshire

Maintain and where possible improve the condition and species richness of hedgerows in Bedfordshire

Targets

- A. Maintain and if appropriate expand by 2015 the 2006 length of hedgerows managed on one (834.4 km) or both (436.5 km) sides (ELS options EB1 and EB2)
- B. Maintain and if appropriate expand by 2015 the 2006 length of 335.7 km of hedgerows subject to enhanced management (ELS options EB3 and EB10)
- C. Extend county hedgerow network where appropriate for the landscape



Proposed action

Abbreviations

BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	LBAP	Local BAP Coordinator
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	NE	Natural England

Action	Implemented by
Site safeguard and management	
1. By 2015 plant 10 km of native species-rich hedgerows in identified hedgerow-poor areas, through a combination of hedgerow planting schemes and other capital works projects	FWAG
Advisory	
2. Conduct an annual one-day local hedgerow event for landowners, managers and practitioners	FWAG
3. By 2012 conduct in priority areas established through action 4 a targeted landowner advisory exercise to provide advice and information where needed and encourage appropriate ELS or HLS option uptake for hedgerows	FWAG
Future research and monitoring	
4. By 2010 identify priority areas for hedgerow planting in Bedfordshire and Luton, taking into account a range of factors such as habitat connectivity, soil conservation and landscape character	FWAG, BCC
Communication and publicity	
5. ????	





Monitoring the Action Plan

This Biodiversity Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the BAP Coordinator and FWAG every five years

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for hedgerows.

Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire have also written action plans for hedgerows.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for lowland meadows, woodland and arable margins. The plan also links to several Bedfordshire and Luton species action plans, in particular arable plants and farmland birds.

Acknowledgements

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator have compiled this action plan. For more information please contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator; contact details are available at www.bedslife.org.uk.

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