

HEDGEROWS

ADVICE FOR PLANNING OFFICERS AND APPLICANTS SEEKING PLANNING
PERMISSION FOR LAND WHICH MAY IMPACT ON HEDGEROWS

ISSUE 02 APRIL 2017

Introduction

All hedgerows are a priority habitat due to their significant biodiversity value which relates not only to the specific plant species within the hedgerow but to their wider value for foraging, providing shelter, and corridors for movement of large numbers of species.

Definition

A hedgerow is defined as any boundary line of trees or shrubs over 20m long and less than 5m wide, and where any gaps between the trees or shrub species are less than 20m wide. Any bank, wall, ditch or tree within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow is considered to be part of the hedgerow habitat, as is the herbaceous vegetation within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow. All hedgerows consisting predominantly (i.e. 80% or more cover) of at least one woody UK native species are covered by this priority habitat.

Hedgerow value

Hedgerows are semi natural features which are very important for biodiversity within our urban areas and within the wider countryside. Hedgerows are rich habitats for wildlife, including vascular plants, birds, mammals and insects. Over 170 species of trees, shrubs and wildflowers have been recorded in Northern Ireland hedgerows (Hegarty, 1992). Hedges in Ireland are generally much younger than hedges in Great Britain, the majority being planted between 1750 and 1850, and often with mixed species (Robinson, 1977).

Townland boundary hedges are considered the oldest, most ancient, hedge types in Ireland. They generally have a greater tree and shrub species diversity and are associated more with woodland herbs. They also have a greater structural diversity and are often associated with a ditch. They can provide the last reservoirs of woodland species in some landscapes due to the widespread woodland loss that occurred in Northern Ireland in the past. Hedgerows overall are particularly important for the survival of widespread yet declining species which are dependent on woodland edge, scrub or grassland habitats.

It is recognised that hedgerows are important not just for biodiversity. Hedgerows are listed as a key characteristic of numerous Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). The removal of hedgerows and amalgamation of fields may have a strong visual impact (Environmental Resource Management, 1999).

Hedgerows are important habitats in their own right. Over 50 Northern Ireland priority species can be associated with hedges.

Hedgerows provide valuable nesting habitat and song posts for breeding birds. In Northern Ireland 36 bird species regularly rely on hedgerows for breeding, shelter and feeding purposes, approximately another 10 occasionally use hedges amongst other habitats for various purposes. Many of these are listed as priority species.

In Northern Ireland hedgerows are important habitats for many mammals, providing cover and facilitating long distance movements of animals. Although most bat species in Northern Ireland have strong associations with broadleaf or mixed woodland and freshwater bodies with bankside vegetation, hedgerows over 1m in height are also an important habitat, especially where they create a double linear feature with hedgerow, treeline or woodland for foraging and commuting (Russ, 1999, Russ et al, 2001). Hedgerows less than 1m in height were little used, in particular, hedgerows that were mechanically 'boxed' cut (Russ, 1999).

The large number of animals and plants found in hedgerows reflects the complexity of the habitat. Hedgerows include elements of woodland especially woodland edge and scrub, and also of grassland. Consequently hedgerows support a wide range of species. Hedgerows also act as wildlife corridors for many species, allowing dispersal and movement between other habitats.

The main protected species associated with hedgerows in Northern Ireland are badgers and bats which should be considered when assessing hedgerow loss.

Legislation

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, transposed by Regulation 32 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, requires Member States to endeavour to encourage the management of features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna. These features are those that, because of their linear and continuous structure of their function as stepping-stones, are essential for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange. Examples given in the Directive are rivers with their banks, traditional field boundary systems (such as hedgerows), ponds and small woods.

Section 1 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 details that it is the duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.

Policy

Planning Policy Statement 2 Natural Heritage, NH5 and the Single Planning Policy Statement apply to hedgerows as a priority habitat and as a feature of the landscape of major importance for wild fauna and flora. The degree of impact depends on the net loss involved, the proportion of connectivity lost and the species richness and structure of the hedges that are lost or fragmented. There may also be protected and priority species impacts that also have to be considered.

Survey requirements

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Checklist (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/environmental-advice-planners>) should be referred to when deciding if an Extended Phase 1 habitat survey is required to ensure there is a complete application. The Landscape Character Area descriptions which highlight those areas where hedgerows are

significant landscape features should also be considered. Historic townland boundaries are available on PRONI webviewer at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-proni-historical-maps-viewer>.

Mitigation

Development can result in significant hedgerow loss on specific sites and cumulatively over Northern Ireland from repeated smaller scale loss. Hedgerow loss impacts on a broad range of species including rare species, protected species and more common species depending on the richness, structure and age of the hedgerow. The following principles should be applied when handling cases with hedgerows.

Principles to be applied:

- Avoid hedgerows with large trees, those that are species rich or those that are town boundaries. If these types of hedgerows are to be lost, surveys of protected and priority species is always required;
- replace 'like for like' when replanting;
- retain connectivity where possible;
- retain hedgerows where they form a significant element of the landscape character;
- integrate hedgerows into the development as boundary features or part of the open space provision to ensure their long term management and retention;
- new planting should link existing landscape features such as patches of woodland to watercourses or ponds;
- new planting should be with native species; and
- some non-native species can be acceptable in an urban environment where screening is required. However they should not be used in rural areas or for replacement of hedgerows of higher biodiversity value

Links with other standing advice

Due to the importance to hedgerows to some species the following standing advice should also be considered when dealing with cases that affect hedgerows:

- Badgers
- Wild Birds
- Bats
- Invasive Species
- Priority Species

Complete the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Checklist to see if surveys are required.

Further Information

JNCC UK Biodiversity Action Plan, Priority Habitat Descriptions, Hedgerows
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>

A native species list is provided at
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doe/natural-guidance-native-species-planting-guidance-2012.pdf> (PDF, 70KB)

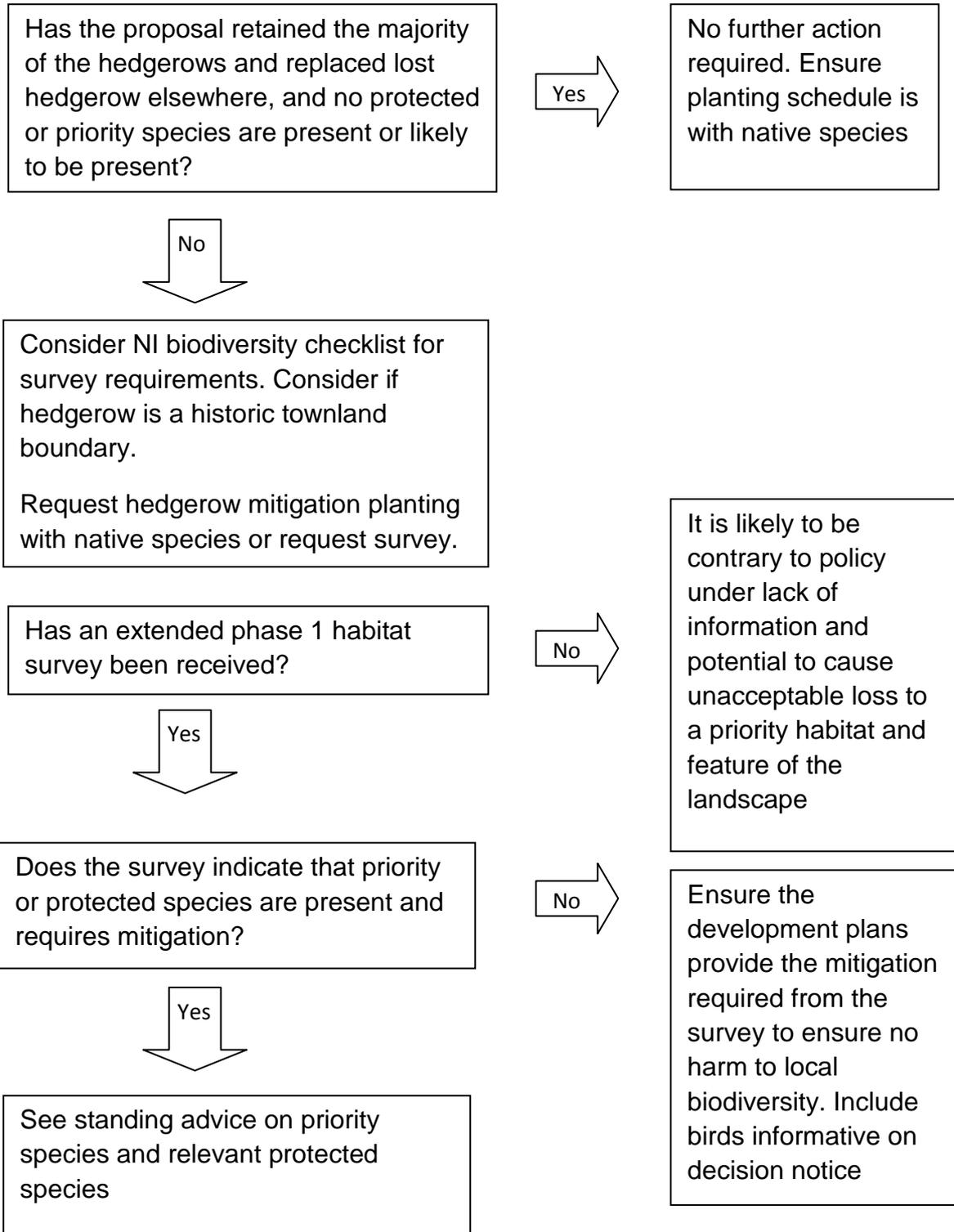
Informative for decision notices

Due to the significant link between hedgerows and breeding birds the following informative should be used in all cases of hedgerow loss:

The applicant's attention is drawn to Article 4 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) under which it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild bird. It is also an offence to intentionally or recklessly: take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or take or destroy an egg of any wild bird. If any person intentionally or recklessly disturbs any wild bird while it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or disturbs dependent young of such a bird they shall be guilty of an offence. Any person who knowingly causes or permits to be done an act which is made unlawful by any of these provisions shall also be guilty of an offence.

It is therefore advised that tree and hedge loss should be kept to a minimum and removal should not be carried out during the bird breeding season between 1st March and 31st August.

Process to consider when handing applications with hedgerows



References

- Environmental Resources Management (1999). Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment. Environment and Heritage Service Research and Development Series No. 99/1-99/23.
- Hegarty, C. A. (1992). The Ecology and Management of Hedges in Northern Ireland. PhD thesis. University of Ulster at Coleraine.
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions, Hedgerows. <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>
- Robinson, P. (1977). The spread of hedged enclosure in Ulster. *Ulster Folklife* 23, 57-69.
- Russ, J. M. (1999). The Microchiroptera of Northern Ireland: community composition, habitat associations and ultrasound. PhD thesis. The Queen's University of Belfast.
- Russ, J. M. & Montgomery, W. I. (2001). Biodiversity Action Plans for Bats in Northern Ireland. Report to the Environment and Heritage Service, Belfast.
- Simonson, W. and Thomas, R. (1999). Biodiversity: Making the links. English Nature, Peterborough.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

**Creating prosperity and well being
through environment and heritage
excellence**

EMFG Planning Response Team
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Malone Lower
Belfast
BT7 2JA
T: (028) 9056 9604
E: PlanningResponse.Team@daera-ni.gov.uk