



CORNISH HEDGES ON DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING SITES

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A specification for the retention and/or reinstatement of Cornish hedges (stone-faced earth banks), stone hedges and turf hedges on greenfield and other sites which are being developed for industrial, housing or other non-agricultural uses. It is based on traditional Cornish hedging practice and provides opportunities for the incorporation of beneficial biodiversity, geological and climate-friendly features within the design of the development.

It is recommended that wherever possible, existing Cornish hedges should be retained on development sites or new hedges built, for their high landscape and environmental values and their longevity as a practical boundary and internal division feature. They are distinctive in local character, make an attractive and effective visual screen and provide a baffle against noise and traffic fumes. They form an excellent barrier against flooding, and make a significant contribution to carbon capture comparative to their footprint on the land.

The environmental characteristics of the existing Cornish hedges on any site may be assessed using the Hedge (& Wall) Importance Test (www.cornishhedges.co.uk).

In removing and rebuilding Cornish hedges and stone hedges, skilled professional hedgers should be employed. Expecting a builder or a contract workforce, not specifically trained to Craftsman standard in Cornish hedging, to carry out this work is an injustice both to them and to the craft, and leads inevitably to trouble, with potential early collapse of the hedges and significant financial loss.

This specification does not refer to the various regulations and permits, way-leaves, consents or other paperwork which may be involved before, during or after the hedging works are carried out.

DEFINITIONS

Stone-clad hedges with an earth core are Cornish hedges. A stone-clad hedge with a rubble stone core is termed a stone hedge. A bank with no stone is called a turf hedge (sometimes named a

"Devon bank"). A hedgerow without a bank is referred to as a hedgerow or thorn hedge. Some hedges contain courses of stone in the lower half, then turfed to the top. For repair and reinstatement, the stone component of the hedge is treated as for a Cornish hedge and the turf component as for a turf hedge. The tradition-based Code of Good Practice for Cornish Hedges is published by the Cornish Hedges Library and is available at www.cornishhedges.co.uk.

GENERAL

All hedges existing on site will, irrespective of their state of repair, be retained and put into good order, or, with the prior written consent of the appropriate authority, be removed and rebuilt at a different location within the same site as agreed with that authority. Special regard will be had to roadside boundaries, consulting the local highways authority before any works are undertaken. All hedges will be fenced off from site operations.

BOUNDARY HEDGES

The ownership of boundary hedges will be established. (See Cornish Hedges Library "Who Owns That Cornish Hedge".) Hedgerows, devoid of a hedgebank, traditionally have no legal width, but Cornish hedges (ie with a hedgebank) may be wholly owned by one side or the other, and here an easement exists for the hedge owner to go on to his neighbour's land to repair and maintain the hedge. He may or may not have an obligation to repair both sides, depending on the history of ownership, and is likely also to have the right to dig turf from his neighbour's land to repair the hedge. Where the whole of a hedge is owned by the neighbour, he also owns the land under the whole of the hedge, and he must not be denied his right of access to maintain both sides. Where the ownership boundary is along the centre of the hedge, each side has the obligation to support the other half.

Therefore, where the boundary lies along the centre of the hedge, the whole hedge must be retained and the owned side put into good repair. Where the site boundary lies outside the hedge, the hedge should be retained (excepting where permanent access is required) and both sides put into good repair. In cases where temporary access is needed, the relevant section of hedge will be taken down and rebuilt as described below.

REPAIR OF RETAINED HEDGES

Cornish Hedges. The side of the hedge is trimmed leaving not less than 300mm (12 ins) of growth on the hedgebank. The side-spread of trees and bushes on the top of the hedge may be cut back to a distance of not less than 2m from the centre line of the hedge. The tree preservation officer of the local planning authority must be consulted as to the possible application of tree preservation orders before felling any trees. The stone structure of the hedge should be examined by a competent craftsman hedger for stones which have moved from their proper place in the courses. In each instance the hedge is taken down to the course below the displaced stone, and rebuilt as described below. Rabbit and other holes in the hedge are filled and repaired in similar manner. Finally soil that has accumulated at the foot of the hedge is "cast up", ie dug out and placed on the top of the hedge by hand or machine so that the base of the hedge becomes level with the adjoining land; excepting that existing ditches will be reinstated to their proper dimensions as advised by the hedger. The hedge is left with its base as wide as the hedge is high, and with the width of its top measuring half of the height of the hedge. Ditches are reinstated to their proper dimensions.

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Stone Hedges. Stone hedges will be repaired or restored to their original style using original or matching stone.

Turf Hedges. Growth on the side of the hedge is trimmed to leave 150-300mm thickness. The side-spread of trees, bushes and other growth on the top of the hedge may be cut back to a distance of not less than 2m from the centre line of the hedge. The tree preservation officer of the local planning authority must be consulted as to the possible application of tree preservation orders before felling any trees. Places in the hedge where the hedge structure has deteriorated with a reduction in height are rebuilt by digging out the affected part of the hedge and building up to correct contours with turf laid in courses, filled behind with soil. Soil that has accumulated at the foot of the hedge is "cast up", ie dug out and placed on the top of the hedge by hand or machine so that the land becomes level to the base of the hedge. The hedge will be left with its base as wide as the hedge is high, and with the width of its top measuring half of the height of the hedge. Ditches are reinstated to their proper dimensions.

REMOVAL AND REINSTATEMENT

Before work on removal begins, photographs are taken of the hedge or hedges for a historical archive record, and to assist in rebuilding to the same style. The height of the hedge is measured at a place where the original hedgebank is whole and undamaged.

All tree growths on the hedge are severed at about 0.5m above ground level, removed from the immediate vicinity of the hedge and disposed of. Rooted pieces of woody growth such as gorse and thorn are saved and the roots kept damp ready for replanting on the rebuilt hedge.

Cornish Hedges.

The ground is excavated along the new line of the hedge to a depth of at least 15 cm (6 inches) and the width of the base of the hedge, which is the same as its height. Any loosened ground along the trench or infilling of depressions must be properly consolidated so as to provide a stable foundation for the rebuilt hedge.

Working carefully from each side, all stones, including grounders (foundation stones) below ground level, are removed from the existing hedge and sorted to be free of earth and plant material. Each side of the hedge and each course of stone is stored separately in sequence, laid out on either side of the new hedge line in its original rows, with the top row furthest from the trench, and leaving a clear working area one metre wide on either side of the trench.

Working carefully from each side, all earth and plants are removed and stored, separate from the stones, in the vicinity of the hedge. Store the inner earth core and all plant material separately. Conservation of wildlife requires that the soil from dismantled hedges is reused in topping the reinstated hedges.

The tradition-based Code of Good Practice for Cornish Hedges is published by the Cornish Hedges Library as the standard for rebuilding work. The hedge is rebuilt by competent hedgers to the Code of Good Practice, using rab (subsoil) for the fill and coursing the stones in the original pattern. Each row of stone is used in the same course as before, with the weathered/mossy face of the stones outward. Special care is taken where rejoining any existing hedge, so that upon inspection the stones are locked well and there is no interruption of the original pattern.

Additional matching stone must be procured where there is an inadequacy. The original earth core and plant material are used for topping the rebuilt hedge.

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PLANTING ON THE HEDGEBANK.

Where a bushy-topped Cornish or turf hedge is required or being re-built, the hedgerow bushes or trees on top will be replaced with rooted splits from the original hedge or where original material is not suitable, with new plants of species natural or traditional to the locality.

Where broad-leaved trees are to be planted the width of the hedge is increased by 1 metre and the trees planted 5 - 10 metres apart in a single row. Stock should be sourced in Cornwall, well grown and not less than 0.5m (20 ins) in height. Thorns will be planted 400mm (16 ins) apart in a single row along the centre line of the hedge top then pruned to 200mm (8 ins) to improve drought-resistance and encourage bushy growth, and if necessary protected with rabbit guards. The turf topping of the hedge is laid upside down to help retain dampness while the plants settle.

FINISHING

The site is cleared and restored to its original profile, with surplus vegetative and woody material being disposed of, preferably in a habitat pile nearby. Note that no seeding or planting of the hedge will be done, other than specified above.

The rebuilt section of hedge may be fenced with sheep netting and two strands of plain wire, the fence being erected 1m from the hedge, with the posts 2m apart, rejoining the hedge 2m distant from the rebuilt section.

Stone hedges.

These come in various styles and must be rebuilt as before. In dismantling a stone hedge, the capping of peat or small stones is removed and stored in the vicinity of the hedge. The stone is removed from the hedge and laid out along the line of the rebuild. For a stone hedge coursed as in a Cornish hedge, the rows are laid out in the same way, with the top row furthest from the trench. In a randomly built hedge the stone is laid out similarly taking stone from the whole length of the hedge and laying out each layer along the new hedge line with the top layer furthest from the trench. In each case this means the grounders (foundation stones) are laid out last in a single row along the new hedge line and nearest to the trench, ready to be laid first. As the hedge is dismantled the usually smaller stone from the internal fill is removed and stored separately for re-use in filling the rebuilt hedge.

The hedge is rebuilt to the same style as the original, with the weathered faces of the stone, usually encrusted with lichens, outward. Other styles of stone hedge such as the tombstone hedge are rebuilt to their original appearance.

Turf hedges.

It is not usually necessary to excavate a trench for a turf hedge, except for a big hedge built with rab core. The existing hedge to be removed is measured at a place where the bank is undamaged. Preparation for removal is as for the Cornish hedge with regard to tree or bushy growth. The green plant covering of the hedgebank is removed to a depth of not less than 15cm (6 ins) and stored separately. The earth fill of the original hedge is used to rebuild the new hedgebank. The earth is laid along the line of the new hedge to a base width the same as the finished height of the

hedgebank, in layers not more than 150 mm (6 ins) thick, and well rammed and compacted. As each layer is made solid and ready, the lumps of vegetation (tobs) from the original hedge are laid along each side and well compacted. Each succeeding row of tobs is laid so as to give the hedge side the correct inwardly curved batter. Trees and bushes are planted along the top as for the Cornish hedge, and tobs placed and compacted along the top.

Ideally, turf hedges should only be removed and rebuilt during the autumn and winter months. In very dry weather compaction may be compromised and vegetation may die, leaving a weak and faulty hedge.

FINISHING

The site is cleared and restored to its original profile, with surplus vegetative and woody material being disposed of, preferably in a habitat pile nearby. Note that no seeding or planting of the hedge will be done, other than specified above.

The rebuilt hedge may be fenced with sheep netting and two strands of plain wire, the fence being erected 1m from the hedge, with the posts 2m apart, rejoining the hedge 2m distant from the rebuilt section.

More information including the Code of Good Practice for Cornish Hedges is
available at

www.cornishhedges.co.uk / Cornish Hedges Library

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