



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Sir Oliver Heald QC MP
House of Commons
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Our ref: MC2022/16868/BG

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5 September 2022

Dear Sir Oliver,

Thank you for your email of 23 August about the Government's hedgerows policy. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Hedgerows are vitally important ecological building blocks in our farmed landscape. They maintain the distinctive character of our countryside and provide crucial habitats and food for wildlife. Hedgerows can store carbon, improve local air quality and benefit the rural economy by boosting job creation for hedgerow planting and management in local communities.

Defra wants to reward the work that farmers do to manage hedgerows on their holdings sustainably. Our primary tools to deliver environmentally beneficial hedgerow management and hedgerow creation are the Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship (CS) schemes. These schemes continue to fund hedgerow management, with CS funding restoration and laying to deliver recognised benefits for wildlife, landscape, and the historic environment. Hedgerow management is one of the most popular options within CS, with several options available for planting, managing and restoring hedgerows.

We will continue to offer grants for hedgerows and boundaries in CS. While the 2022 application windows for CS Higher Tier, Mid Tier and Wildlife Offer agreements are now closed, subject to budgetary availability, the application window will remain open year-round for capital-only applications, including for Hedgerows and Boundaries capital items. The scheme will open for a final application round in 2023, for agreements starting in 2023 and 2024.

Through our new agricultural schemes, we will be able to reach even more farmers and landowners. Our aim is for at least 70% of farms to participate in our new schemes. The first of our three new agricultural schemes, the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), will pay for a variety of actions that all farmers can do to manage their land in an environmentally sustainable way. Part of this scheme is the hedgerow standard, under which we will pay farmers to plant more hedgerows, leave them uncut, or raise the cutting height. To provide habitat for wildlife, we will incentivise farmers and land managers to maintain and plant more hedgerow trees.

The hedgerow standard has also been designed to improve connectivity and strengthen landscape character. Newly planted hedgerows, for which capital grants will be available, will be immediately available for annual payment. We are testing this standard in our now live SFI pilot, before offering it as part of the roll-out of SFI. SFI pilot participants may also apply for a CS Capital Grants (SFI Pilot) agreement to support their SFI pilot standards, including for hedgerows.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,



VICTORIA PRENTIS MP