# Hedgerow restoration gains momentum as UK targets 30,000 miles to boost biodiversity



Hedgerows, those intricate lines of shrubs and trees that snake through the British landscape, embody a rich history and play a vital role in both agriculture and ecology. As Richard Negus eloquently highlights, these structures are not merely remnants of a bygone era but essential components of our countryside, having been shaped by human hands since as early as 2500 BC. Their evolution tracks closely with our agricultural practices, reflecting shifts in societal needs and environmental awareness.

Historically, hedgerows served pragmatic purposes; they enclosed livestock, protected crops from harsh weather, and marked boundaries between estates and fields. Over time, this utilitarian planting evolved into a complex ecosystem. Species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, and hazel formed dense thickets, inadvertently creating habitats for a plethora of wildlife. This duality—where practical farming led to the nurturing of biodiversity—speaks to the serendipitous relationship between human activity and nature.

This relationship, however, has often been precarious. During the two decades following World War II, a wave of agricultural intensification resulted in significant hedgerow loss as government policies sought to maximise production. As Negus notes, the drive for greater yields often led to the removal of these ecological corridors, with the expectation that their elimination would create expansive fields free from the perceived hindrances of hedges. Unfortunately, this shortsighted approach had adverse effects, as evidenced by declining biodiversity and deteriorating soil health, necessitating a reevaluation of previous practices.

This sentiment is echoed in various studies. Research from the Campaign to Protect Rural England indicates that urban development and intensified agriculture have significantly contributed to hedgerow degradation, making conservation efforts imperative. Since the late 20th century, there has been a concerted move towards restoration, with initiatives supporting the planting of new hedges. Grant programmes and policy shifts have aimed to reinstate hedgerows in areas where they had been lost, recognising their role in combating soil erosion, improving water quality, and enhancing wildlife habitats.

The practical benefits of hedgelaying, the art of crafting hedges through a process of cutting and weaving, reinforces their ecological value. By ensuring hedgerows are thick and healthy, farming practitioners are also fostering environments vital for various species. As Richard describes his craft, the importance of nurturing these structures becomes clear: a well-managed hedge not only provides shelter and sustenance for wildlife but also plays a crucial role in carbon storage and soil preservation.

Moreover, recent policy aims from the last Conservative administration, which set ambitious targets for new hedgerow planting, underscore a growing recognition of the necessity for these habitats in modern conservation efforts. The target to plant 30,000 miles of hedgerows by 2037 highlights a shift in priorities, moving towards implementing sustainable agricultural practices that align environmental health with productivity.

Thus, while hedgerows were once merely viewed through the lens of agricultural utility, the modern perspective champions them as vital ecological corridors that sustain life and enhance biodiversity. As Negus poignantly states, the future of farming and wildlife hinges on our understanding and management of these ancient structures. In a world increasingly grappling with ecological crises, the story of hedgerows offers a glimmer of hope: a chance to blend the art of agriculture with the science of conservation, ensuring that these vital arteries of the landscape endure for generations to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062087/hedgerows-labour-farming-subsidy-cuts), [[2]](https://www.cpre.org.uk/discover/a-natural-history-of-hedgerows/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062087/hedgerows-labour-farming-subsidy-cuts), [[3]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/farmland/hedgerow), [[4]](https://worldofhedges.co.uk/the-loss-of-hedgerows-in-the-uk-since-world-war-ii/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/british-hedgerows/), [[6]](https://www.hedgelaying.org.uk/benefits-of-hedgerows/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062087/hedgerows-labour-farming-subsidy-cuts), [[7]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/farm-hedges/benefits-of-a-hedgerow)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062087/hedgerows-labour-farming-subsidy-cuts), [[2]](https://www.cpre.org.uk/discover/a-natural-history-of-hedgerows/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062087/hedgerows-labour-farming-subsidy-cuts> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cpre.org.uk/discover/a-natural-history-of-hedgerows/> - This article from the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) explores the origins and evolution of hedgerows in England. It traces their development from the Bronze Age, highlighting their role as boundaries and habitats. The piece also discusses the decline of hedgerows due to agricultural intensification and urban development, emphasizing the need for conservation efforts to preserve these vital features of the English countryside.
3. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/farmland/hedgerow> - The Wildlife Trusts provide an in-depth look at hedgerows, detailing their historical significance, ecological importance, and the threats they face. The article covers the origins of hedgerows, their role in supporting biodiversity, and the impact of agricultural practices on their decline. It also offers guidance on identifying and conserving hedgerows to protect the wildlife that depends on them.
4. <https://worldofhedges.co.uk/the-loss-of-hedgerows-in-the-uk-since-world-war-ii/> - This piece examines the significant loss of hedgerows in the UK since World War II, attributing it to agricultural intensification and urban development. It discusses the historical role of hedgerows, the consequences of their removal on biodiversity and soil health, and the legislative measures introduced to protect and restore them, such as the Hedgerows Regulations 1997.
5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/british-hedgerows/> - An article from The Washington Post delves into the history and decline of British hedgerows. It highlights how post-war government policies encouraged the removal of hedges to increase food production, leading to significant biodiversity loss. The piece also covers current conservation efforts and the role of hedgerows in preserving the UK's natural heritage.
6. <https://www.hedgelaying.org.uk/benefits-of-hedgerows/> - The National Hedgelaying Society outlines the numerous benefits of hedgerows, including providing shelter for livestock and crops, reducing wind speed, and offering habitats for wildlife. The article emphasizes the importance of hedgerows in maintaining biodiversity and supporting various species, and discusses the role of hedgelaying in their conservation.
7. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/farm-hedges/benefits-of-a-hedgerow> - The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) details the ecological and agricultural benefits of hedgerows. The article explains how hedgerows provide shelter for livestock, act as barriers to windborne pests, and support a variety of wildlife, including pollinators and birds. It also discusses the importance of hedgerow management for maintaining these benefits.