4.5 Environmental management and conservation

Managing traditional field boundaries

4.5.9

Traditional boundaries such as hedges, ditches, banks and stone walls act as corridors for wildlife through agricultural land and the wider countryside. They are also important landscape and historic features. They perform an important function on organic farms by:

- maintaining a diverse ecology
- acting as valuable reservoirs for beneficial animals and insects, and
- providing shelter for your stock.

4.5.10

You should:

- use traditional methods and materials to maintain field boundaries
- trim your hedges in January and February, leaving some hedges untrimmed each year on a two or three year cycle, and
- clear ditches in stages.

Note – you should either keep a section of each ditch uncleared each year, or clear opposite sides in alternate years. You should agree your rotational plan with us through your farm conservation plan.

4.5.11

To provide habitats and food sources for birds, mammals and insects you should keep an uncultivated strip of perennial grass or wild flowers, planted or naturally regenerated, around any fields larger than two hectares:

- the strip should average two metres wide, measured from the edge of the field boundary or hedge
- you may graze this area, but not plough or use fertilisers, and
- you should cut them only once in a two year period to control scrub.

4.5.12

To allow wildlife to travel between habitats, there should be no more than 200 metres between any part of your arable fields and a permanent area of non-cropped habitat (such as a hedge, ditch or beetle bank). The permanently non-cropped area should be at least two metres wide.

4.5.13

You should carry out risk assessments of all your agricultural practices and their potential impact on the environment.

4.5.14

You must manage river banks to keep erosion and soil run-off to a minimum.
4.5.15
You must get our permission before removing hedges, banks, ditches or walls.

Note – we will allow this on guidance from a conservation advisor and after taking into account any compensatory environmental work.

4.5.16
You must get our permission before trimming hedges annually.
Note – we will allow this only if your local authority needs you to trim them for road safety or access reasons, or if you can show it is beneficial for wildlife.

4.5.17
You must not trim your hedges between 1 March and 31 August.