



ADVICE FOR TRIMMING ROADSIDE HEDGES IN CORNWALL

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All roads that are looked after today by the local highways authority are shown on the 1/25000 map, including public footpaths and bridleways. The total mileage adds up to 4,650 miles, of which nearly half are unclassified ways. This means that there are about 9,000 miles of associated hedges, which provide a unique landscape, shelter and wildlife habitats. These roadside hedges are usually hundreds, sometimes thousands of years old. On main roads, they give a pleasant environment. On narrow lanes, the wealth of flowering plants is a joy to behold. On bridleways and footpaths, the individual plants, insects and other animals are seen at close hand.

Most of these hedges require differing degrees of management. Under the Highways Act 1980, the Highway Authority has the legal duty to prevent, as far as possible, the obstruction of roads. This includes ensuring that land owners and occupiers manage hedge growth on their roadside hedges. The stone and turf structure of Cornish hedges fosters an especially rich bio-diversity and supports wildlife indefinitely, so long as man's interference keeps to the minimum of disturbance. They are very susceptible to damage by over-zealous trimming, but, when correctly managed, their plant and animal populations are balanced and persistent.

A finger-bar trimmer (reciprocating scythe) is much less damaging to wildlife than is a flail-mower, especially on Cornish hedges, where the flail also degrades the hedge's structure, causing collapse. Overall, trimming should be left until late winter. Summer trimming is confined to removal of hedge growth only where it constitutes an actual traffic hazard, for example on single-lane roads only a few metres at passing places, blind corners and junctions should be trimmed where necessary. The Highways Authority is aware that summer trimming disrupts nature's seeding and breeding cycles, but has to reconcile, as far as possible, the requirements of road safety and wildlife.

Owners and occupiers of land with roadside hedges are responsible for maintaining them so that growth does not impair the safety of highway users. This duty is likely to include any hedge that directly abuts any public right of way, and includes:-

* trimming roadside hedges to maintain visibility, particularly at junctions, on the inside of bends and at passing-places.

* removing dead or decaying trees and other growth likely to fall across the highway.

- * removing branches and other growth that may prevent the passage of high-sided vehicles.
- * keeping road signs and the light from public street lights' free of obstruction.

The following programme meets Cornwall Council's requirements for maintaining traffic visibility, while reducing the harm to wildlife. The damage to wildlife and hedge structure by the flail at any time of year is unacceptable, so a finger-bar scythe trimmer should be used.

When to trim road hedge sides

Summer trimming

Single-lane road with no verge:

Trim the hedge-side only at passing-places, junctions and blind corners once in June or July, leaving 200 - 300mm (8 - 12 inches) of growth.

Two-lane road less than 8ft wide (no white line) with no verge:

Trim road hedge-side once in July or August, leaving 200 - 300mm (8 - 12 inches) of growth.

Other road types, and single-lane roads as a whole:

Do not trim in the months from March to October inclusive.

Winter trimming

Road hedges not trimmed in summer :

Trim road hedges once in November, December, January or February leaving 30 - 50cm (12 - 20 inches) of growth. Single-lane roads trim each opposite side in alternate years, leaving one side untrimmed for wildlife.

Trimming during March to August is likely to damage or destroy birds' nests. Except as recommended above for road safety (passing places and blind junctions), this is an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as it could reasonably have been avoided.

Some hedges in windswept localities grow very slowly and need trimming less often, or not at all.

Where there is a verge, usually hedge trimming is only needed at junctions and blind corners to maintain visibility.

Hedges along bridleways and footpaths should be trimmed in winter and only as necessary for keeping the right of way open. Woody growth only (eg brambles, gorse, thorn) should be trimmed from the hedge side, leaving soft green growth of grass and wild flower plants untouched. As a real aid to wildlife, trim each opposite side of the path in different years rotationally, where width allows passage with one side trimmed.

Maintenance of trees and bushes in roadside hedges.

The hedge is not trimmed horizontally across the top. Bushes growing along the centre line of the hedge top should be left to grow naturally. These will break the force of crosswinds, greatly improve the wider

landscape, and help combat global warming

[cont.]

Trees and bushes growing from the hedge itself or the farmer's field (but not from the verge) which canopy over the highway must be trimmed to a suitable height for pedestrian and vehicle usage on the road. This is done in October, November, December, or January, when the sap is not flowing. Broad-leaved trees in less sheltered areas should be selectively coppiced and allowed to regrow. Individual trunks should be cut down to 0.5m (20") before growing tall and heavy enough to be in danger of rocking or blowing down in a gale. Smaller trunks are left to grow on, then cut out individually in their turn.

When felling, coppicing or pruning trees, consent may be required from the Council if the trees are protected by a tree preservation order or are in a conservation area. Additionally, a tree-felling licence may be needed from the Forestry Commission.

Roadside verges

The verge between the road and the hedge includes trees and bushes growing on it. Trimming growth on the verge for visibility purposes, and maintenance of road drainage ditches are the responsibility of the Highway Authority. When cutting verges the Highway Authority may also trim part of roadside hedges, but this does not relieve the owner/occupier of his responsibility for trimming the hedge.

Responsibility when trimming

Trimming should be timed to avoid peak daytime traffic flows, and not done at night. The trimmer should be mounted on the left hand side of the tractor so the driver can work with the flow of traffic.

Warning signs should be displayed at the ends of the section being cut, and at road junctions. Signs may be purchased via the Highway Authority. Do not trim closer than 200mm (8") as this causes stones to fall out and endangers safety on the highway.

All trimmings should be cleared from the highway, including from foot-ways and drainage features. Herbicides should not be used on hedges except for certain invasive species. Advice on the best procedure for these, such as Japanese knotweed (now subject to regulations) can be obtained from Cornwall Council.

Those responsible for trimming, or their sub-contractor, should have public liability insurance cover suitable for working in the highway. Many private householders have a short length of roadside hedge to look after, and they have the same legal responsibilities as other owners and occupiers under the Highways Act 1980. At locations where roadside hedge growth has become a problem, the Highway Authority is likely to serve notice on the owner/occupier requiring the necessary work to be completed within a stated period. Failure to comply with the conditions of this notice may result in the Highway Authority undertaking the works and recovering the expenses from the owner/occupier. Cornwall Council is the relevant Highway Authority for county roads, and works closely with the Parish Councils and other organisations. It encourages roadside hedge owners and land occupiers to act in a responsible way towards users of highways, and is happy to give advice. The A30 and A38 are Trunk Roads and are the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

For more information on hedge maintenance please see www.cornishhedges.co.uk /Cornish Hedges Library.

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